

2009

# Strutting it up through histories: a performance genealogy of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade

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**STRUTTING IT UP THROUGH HISTORIES:  
A PERFORMANCE GENEALOGY OF THE PHILADELPHIA MUMMERS PARADE**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor in Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

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May 2009

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you first and foremost to my advisor, Michael Bowman, without whom this would never have happened. Your playful honesty and intense attention made me want to be a better performer, scholar, and person. Thanks also to the rest of my committee who were equally as valuable to me: Ruth Bowman, whose ability to not only accept me for who I am, but also bring out the best in me allowed me to blossom as a scholar and performer; Patricia Suchy, who has pushed the boundaries of what I understood and brought a joyful romanticism to academia for me; John Fletcher, who helped me remember what brought me here and asked me to redefine the scholarly conversation so important to this project; and Monica Postelnicu, my dean's representative, who contributed her knowledge of representation and media to the discussion.

Thanks to my family who have encouraged me when I felt defeated, supported me when I just didn't know, and laughed with me in my successes: To my mom, who listened to endless processing about the ideas in this dissertation and has always held me up through the journey; To my dad, who has laughed with me at the absurdity of this world; to my brother, Mark, whose sarcasm I didn't always understand at first, but whose support was always evident and helpful; to my niece, Mia, and my nephew, David, who helped me remember the innocent beauty of play; and to my sister, Amanda, who has been my best friend in the entire world and without whom I would not be here today.

Enormous thanks to all of my mentors, colleagues, peers, and friends. Although you are far too many to name individually, your contributions have been extensive and have helped more than words could express. In particular, I want to thank: David Olsen, whose continued support of my life and career from my Masters program has helped me to make it this far; Crystal Lane Swift, whose unexpected friendship brought more to my life than I thought possible; the Writing Club, whose members made me remember the joy of scholarly conversation; the womyn at

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival who are my life and my loves; the Mummers (Especially Palma and John Lucas, Dunkin, and all of the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association members), who not only inspired this entire study, but also reminded me to strut it out, even when I was exhausted; Zia Jamison-Frank for the awesome map; Kathi Harbeson for the backup string band picture; Pai Tama, who shared my slightly-used kidney for two short months but who will always share a piece of my heart and who I miss everyday (Good morning, sunshine!); Danielle McGeough, who acted as an editor, mentor, mentee, colleague, friend, and sister, and without whom I could not have done this. And lastly, to Angi, whose trenchant comment has summed up this project and all work to come with humor and playfulness: "Mummers are cool! Roar!"

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the cultural performances of the parade community in one of the oldest and largest parades in the country: the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. The modern parade celebration consists of groups of mostly working-class white men from South Philadelphia who dress up in extravagant sequined and feathered costumes and, beginning in South Philadelphia, march toward City Hall on one of the largest streets in the city on New Year's Day. The parade is competitive and marked by performance competitions at the end of each parade. The parade's history in the city of Philadelphia is extensive but contested. Many locals know little about the parade and its community, while others debate its history and the positionality of its community within Philadelphia. Therefore, the parade community holds a precarious position in the larger Philadelphia community, which results in many questions and concerns about the role and function of the parade in contemporary Philadelphia.

This study examines the cultural performances of the parade community in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. By tracking the histories of three specific sets of performances—those of race, gender, and class— this work analyzes how both parade participants and members of the larger Philadelphia community attempt to make sense of the parade. In choosing the performances of race, gender, and class, the study looks at ways the parade community relates to these identities at various points in history, and it argues that the Mummers perform these histories, often unconsciously, on and off the parade stage. By using a cultural performance perspective, and ethnographic and historiographic methods, I assert that in this performance of history the Mummers attempt to make sense of their own identity as a community, with potentially problematic results.

Through the research stemming from the unofficial theme song, “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers,” the study finds that the Mummers use a kind of strategic invisibility to distance the parade community from problematic issues in its history while maintaining legitimacy with other bits of the history. In the history of gender, a paradox with a passing form of female impersonation on one hand and an all-male performance tradition on the other causes trouble with Philadelphians’ understandings of gender in the parade. Lastly, the city adoption of the parade in 1901 focused the parade community on the socially acceptable performances involving the financial expense and commoditization of the parade, which results in a struggle between the working class history of the community and the financial focus of the contemporary parade. The study, therefore, reveals the significance of history in the performance of community in the Philadelphia Mummers Community.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **LEARNING THE STEPS TO THE MUMMERS STRUT**

#### **Introduction**

January 1, 2009; 11:30am: I make my way through crowds of people, making sure to keep an eye on the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association, with whom I am marching. We head north on Broad Street in Center City Philadelphia in the 2009 Philadelphia Mummers Parade. As the parade performers slow and stop around Locust Street, I take the chance to talk to some parade spectators. I stand next to a small family for a minute, trying to listen to their conversation for clues as to who they are. Finally, I turn to the woman—a thirty-something woman, clearly bundled for the freezing weather. I ask her if they are from the area or how they heard of the Mummers. She tells me that she grew up here and that her family was in for the holidays, so she wanted to bring her kids to see the parade. "I don't get it, but it's pretty," she says. Her husband chimes in, "I really don't get it! I grew up in Southern New Jersey [about thirty minutes away from Philadelphia], and I had heard of it, but I really don't get it. It's just weird." The kids nod as they shiver and seem to look to me for answers. I thank them, and move on with the parade. I ask dozens more people similar questions throughout the day, with similar responses. Everyone at the parade that day seems to be either related to the Mummers or, less commonly, a voyeur who happened to be in the neighborhood on New Year's Day. Regardless, no one I talk to that day understands it, and I start to wonder if I understand it either, even after two years of research.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

The Philadelphia Mummers Parade is one of the oldest and largest parades in the United States (Brewster). Today's version of the celebration consists of groups of mostly working-class white men from South Philadelphia who dress up in extravagant sequined and feathered costumes and, beginning in South Philadelphia, march toward City Hall via one of the largest streets in the city on New Year's Day. At the end of the parade, individuals or small groups from the parade associations perform for a panel of judges in hopes of winning various cash prizes and the notoriety of the first place club in a particular division (Mummers.com). Despite the fact that the parade is one of the oldest and largest in the country, relatively few people know about it today and even fewer understand it. The parade stands as a kind of enigma in the complex and multiple histories of one of the first US cities: Philadelphia. Having grown up in the Philadelphia



area, I have long known of the parade but have never understood it. I have found myself wondering from where the parade comes and how it came to be what it is today. Throughout my research friends, family, colleagues, and even complete strangers posed similar questions about the parade. Even though I have met no one who truly understands the Mumpers, outside of the Mumpers themselves, people often react with strong opinions against the parade. Thus, I came to the topic of this study: The Philadelphia Mumpers Parade.

This study examines the cultural performances of the parade community in the Philadelphia Mumpers Parade. By tracking the histories of three specific sets of performances—those of race, gender, and class— this work analyzes how both parade participants and members of the larger Philadelphia community attempt to make sense of the parade. In choosing the performances of race, gender, and class, this study looks at ways the parade community relates to these different identities at various points in history, and it argues that the Mumpers perform these histories, often unconsciously, on and off the parade stage. By using a cultural performance perspective, and ethnographic and historiographic methods, I assert that in this performance of history the Mumpers attempt to make sense of their own identity as a community, with potentially problematic results. In this chapter, I expand on these topics and terms by introducing the subject, purpose, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and significance that drive this study.

## THE PARADE

The Philadelphia Mumpers Parade is a New Year's Day parade performance/celebration put on by groups of people from South Philadelphia (Mumpers.com). Although this study reveals the more intricate details of the who, what, when, where, and how of the parade as it unfolds, I stumble through some basic demographics here, with the promise to flesh out the details in the following chapters. Because of the intricacies of the topic and the method, many

terms, dynamics, and situations related to the parade may be somewhat unclear in these early pages, but are clarified within the rest of the study.

The Mummers were historically all men from South Philadelphia, though now women and people from other areas participate. They work in groups ranging from a few dozen to many hundreds of people called *New Year's Associations*. Contemporarily, most people belong to groups according to family history (e.g., because my father was a comic in this association, so am I), though historically, group membership followed different rules, which will be fleshed out in later chapters. Parade associations charge yearly dues to their members and have independent operating charters. Because the charters are independent, it is difficult to generalize about the operating procedures of all groups; however, most groups hold monthly business meetings at their clubhouses around South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in South Philadelphia, and are run by captains, vice-captains, and secretaries, which are appointed, often lifetime positions. The groups spend time during the year fundraising, recruiting, and preparing their costumes, floats, and performances for the parade on New Year's Day. Additionally, the groups serve as social networks for members, often supporting Mummers' families through difficult times. Each group belongs to a division: Comic, Fancy, String band, or Fancy Brigade.<sup>1</sup> Each division has additional governing charters and leaders. Lastly, the entire Mummers Parade has a governing charter and a group of leaders who have answered to city officials since the parade was first officially adopted by the city in 1901 (Mummers.com).

In order to explicate the question of who the Mummers are, however, I am compelled to discuss some details about the geography of Philadelphia as a whole and South Philadelphia specifically. The city of Philadelphia is a planned or designed city, which results in the layout of

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<sup>1</sup> The Fancy Brigade division is now completely separate from the rest of the divisions. The clubs of this division do not participate in the full parade and are neither fiscally nor socially related to the parade as a whole. While I speak to this specific break in Chapter Four, this dissertation focuses on the other three parading divisions.

the streets in a grid. William Penn, the founder of Philadelphia, originally wanted the city to be a rural area with houses standing far apart from one another, surrounded by British-style gardens. The early residents of the city did not follow his plan, however, and quickly parceled out their land plots (Welch 5-11). Regardless, the streets had been designed, so the grid layout remains to this day (see fig. 1).



Figure 1. Map of Center City Philadelphia (map by Zia Jamison-Frank, reprinted with permission).

Numbered streets run north and south, whereas named streets (often named for trees, particularly in the Center City area) run east and west. In the exact center of the original designed city, City Hall stands on a four-square-block parcel of land. The X and Y axes of the city, which intersect at City Hall, are Market Street, running east and west, and Broad Street, running north and south. Most streets in Philadelphia are small one-way, one-lane roads, whereas Broad and Market Streets are large four to six lane streets, historically used to transport goods from the ports in South and East Philadelphia. The official Mummers Parade has almost always marched up Broad Street from South Philadelphia toward City Hall, so this street has particular significance in the parade history. Additionally, Broad Street was the only access route to and from the economically deprived and ignored areas of South Philadelphia, which were extremely hard to traverse before the late 1800s. Therefore, Broad Street remains an important symbolic and physical access route for South Philadelphians (Welch).

Historically, South Philadelphia was a very poor area that received little to no financial or other assistance from the municipality. Even today, South Philadelphia reflects these roots with a reputation for lower priced homes and working-class communities. Although there are no strict geographical definitions of South Philadelphia, particularly because the area is an amalgamation of many smaller neighborhoods, for the purposes of this study, I use the local understandings of South Philadelphia as all areas south of South Street, north and west of the Delaware River, and east of the Schuylkill River. The most densely populated area of South Philadelphia in terms of the Mummers participation is around South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street where most of the parade associations have clubhouses. Though some contemporary participants come from all over the area, and occasionally from out of state, the primary locus for the community is in these historically poor neighborhoods of South Philadelphia. Once the primary location for marginalized groups of immigrants and ex-slaves in Philadelphia, South Philly, as it is called, is and has been made up of

largely Italian, African American, Irish, Polish and Russian populations. The Mummers Parade community reflects this ethnic breakdown and is mostly made up of Italian, Irish, and Polish men and women who either currently live in South Philadelphia or have some familial connection to the area (Dubin 1-14).

About 15,000 Mummers march up Broad Street from South Philadelphia to City Hall with their New Year's Associations by division on New Year's Day each year (Mummers.com). During the length of the parade the Mummers use a particular marching style, called *strutting*. The best description of the Mummers strut that I have heard came from Dunkin when he attempted to teach it to me on an August day at the Mummers Museum. He said:

It's basically like the box step. You just keep stepping. Then you pick up your knees, and move your elbows like you're a chicken. Then you point your chest to the air, like you're really proud. The last step is to look down at the ground like you lost something. Just keep repeating those steps.

Mummers often carry canes or tiny umbrellas which assist in the bodily performance of strutting. The Mummers strut up Broad Street culminating the parade with special dance performances in front of City Hall. In these performances, the Mummers dance individually, in pairs, trios, or groups in rehearsed thirty-second routines to popular or string band music (Mummers.com).

The spectators of the parade are currently almost all friends and family members of the Mummers themselves, particularly in the South Philadelphia neighborhoods of Broad Street. Some tourists attend the parade in Center City, but for the most part, the audience is closely associated with the parade community. Patricia Anne Masters comments on the issue of audience during the 1950s and 1960s in her book, *The Philadelphia Mummers: Building Community Through Play*. She notes, "Parade attendance figures veered wildly from as few as two hundred thousand in 1954 to as many as 1.6 million in 1961" (51). The audience numbers have dropped

significantly since then. Through the 1980s, the parade saw spectators in the hundreds of thousands, but after a brief change in parade route to Market Street in 1999, attendance numbers dropped significantly. The parade does not seem to have recovered the previous interest and in 2009 the parade saw its lowest spectator numbers, according the news reports. Masters claims that “the city stopped estimating numbers mostly out of embarrassment” (60).

Panels of judges made up of artists and other cultural and civic leaders from the city judge the costumes based on the final dance routines and costume construction and design. Each costume or group of costumes wins a place based on the scores the judges designate. Roughly the top 25% of the costumes get on the winners list. A costume on the winners list wins a cash prize ranging from \$50 for the smaller costumes further down on the list to \$3000 for the top captain’s prize. Total prize money varies from year to year. In 2007 the awards totaled over \$395,000, and were funded by the city and various local and national businesses. Other than the financial prizes, the scores from the costumes on the winners list add up to give the association a total score for the parade, and perhaps most significantly, rank the associations by place. The winning association from each division gets a trophy, and the pride and notoriety of the First Place Club award for that year (Mummers.com). The competition is fierce but generally friendly, and differs in the details by division: Comic, Fancy and String Band.

The Comic division marches first, and as its name suggests, its performances emphasize comedy and satire. The Comics are largely responsible for touching on political issues and have been traditionally the division that causes the most controversy in the parade. Some comic costumes have explored women’s issues, war, politics and other contemporary topics. Within the Comic division, there are two types of costumes: the wench and the traditional comics. Each wench association is made up of hundreds of men and boys. Wearing modern day versions of minstrel wench costumes, they dance up Broad Street en masse, letting their costumes speak for

the controversy with which they deal (see Fig. 2). The wenchers are in many ways responsible for telling a large part of the history of racism that still exists in the Mummers.



Figure 2. Comic Wenchers on January 6, 2007 (photo by the author).

Blackface, the practice of painting white men's faces black, was a tradition in the Mummers Parade until 1964 when official city policy ruled it out. While blackface is officially no longer permitted in the parade, many wenchers still wear blackface, and the wench costume itself harkens back to the problematic racial performance of minstrelsy.



Figure 3. Traditional Comics on January 6, 2007 (photo by the author).

The other type of Comic, the individuals who look like traditional clowns (see fig. 3), often perform controversial topics. Through these performances multiple and sometimes conflicting understandings of the city's history come to the fore (Mummers.com).



The Fancy division marches second and consists of over twenty different types of costumes including: duos, trios, handsomes, frame suits, and juveniles in elaborate sequined and feathered costumes (see fig. 4). In addition to these types of costumes each Fancy club follows a theme from which they construct a captain's float and costume and a dance performance with other support costumes ("Mummers Parade").



Figure 4. Handsome Fancy on January 6, 2007 (photo by the author).

The Fancies tend to be the highlight of the parade for many of the spectators. The handsome costumes, the highlight of the Fancies, consist of satin and sequin-decorated pants suits or dresses with elaborately adorned aprons and back-pieces that weigh up to seventy-five pounds and are made of welded metal frames covered in fabric and up to fifty dozen feathered plumes. Another highlight of the Fancies is the giant frame suits that weigh between 150 and 300 pounds and combine the beauty of a handsome back-piece with a hexagonal wood base (see fig. 5). The Mummers carrying these suits roll them up the street and often show off by lifting the whole thing off the ground and dancing around with it. The Fancy costumes are some of the most expensive and impressive visual productions in the parade (Mummers.com).





Figure 5. Frame Suit on January 6, 2007 (photo by the author).

Third to march are the string bands (see fig. 6). These groups focus on both costumes and string band music. Some of the string bands emphasize the music and replicate marching band style in their performances, whereas other groups equally stress music and performance with elaborate costumes like those of the Fancy division.



Figure 6. String Band Association  
(photo by the Mummies Museum, reprinted with permission).

Additionally, the string bands play at special events year round and are therefore an integral part of community outreach (Mummies.com). Of all of the groups, these are rumored to be the most

traditional and conservative in terms of following Mummer tradition and rules, with some of the bands banning women from entrance into their clubhouses.

These different divisions, and the multiple associations within each division, focus extensively on their own histories and the histories of the parade as a whole. On various websites, one can find a plethora of perspectives on specific histories of the clubs and general histories of the parade. These histories led me to the central point of this study.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study hinges on the highly contested history of the parade. Although it is clear that the Mummers Parade has been going on in Philadelphia for over a century, different Mummers groups and South Philadelphia communities debate the origins of the parade. The parade officially began on January 1, 1901, but from where the Mummers come is an entirely more complicated question that numerous authors have attempted to answer. Gary Jennings points to Swedish immigrants as the founders of the Mummers. In his book, *Parades!*, Jennings claims that the Swedes brought the custom of New Year's Day celebrations to Philadelphia toward the end of the 1800s and argues that "the Brits later joined in the fun and imitated their own traditional 'mummers'" (47).

Other histories point to Ireland as the locus of the tradition ("Mummers Parade"). In Ireland, Mummers plays were seasonal folk plays performed by troupes of actors known as Mummers. Many argue that the Mummers Parade employs performance techniques, methods, and styles used in the Mummers plays, thereby buttressing claims that the parade stems from an Irish ancestry (e.g., Jennings; Dubin; Mummers.com). Specific aspects from the Mummers plays are undoubtedly found in the Mummers Parade. For example, the Irish actors performed the plays in the street at times but more usually as house-to-house visits (Dubin 21). These travelling performance troupes may influence the transient performance of parades in general, and this

parade specifically, as house-to-house movement is a very important part of the history of the Mummers Parade (Jennings 47); however, to argue that the Mummers Parade specifically stems from Mummers plays is a potentially misguided attempt at a linear or structural history.

Although there are style similarities such as blackface performance and female impersonation found both in the Mummers plays and the Mummers Parade, a unified connection cannot be verified. Additionally, the similarity of the names is not necessarily significant. After all, the word *mommo*, a word that shows up quite often in court documents from the middle ages around the time of the Mummers plays, is a Greek word meaning “to mask” (Chambers 221).

Still other sources attempt to connect the Philadelphia Mummers to carnival performances. Murray Dubin argues that although the term *Mummers* has been used since medieval times, the parade tradition may have precedents in German and French carnival customs (22). The official Mummers Parade website points to even earlier carnival traditions. The site claims:

Mummers' tradition dates back to 400 BC and the Roman Festival of Saturnalias where Latin laborers marched in masks throughout the day of satire and gift exchange. This included Celtic variations of "trick-or-treat" and Druidic noise-making to drive away demons for the New Year. Reports of rowdy groups "parading" on New Years Day in Philadelphia date back before the revolution. Prizes were offered by merchants in the late 1800's. (Mummers.com)

This official parade rhetoric attempts to position the parade in multiple community histories, including those of the Irish and the Italian, two of the most prominent groups in South Philadelphia and the Mummers Parade.

I argue that the debate about the origins of the parade highlights important aspects of the parade community, and therefore ways that community understands itself. Identifying how the

community does history is perhaps more important than the individual histories themselves. In other words, the historicity, or the performance of history, is the focus here. Della Pollock claims, “[H historicity] performs its difference *in* and *from* history and so articulates history *as* difference” (4; emphasis in original). Thus, I use Pollock’s theories to define historicity as the doing of history, and I focus on how the Mummies’ historicity helps them to make sense of their community.

Although one cannot find a singular origin of the Mummies, by understanding how the Mummies use, communicate, and perform their histories, both in the past and contemporarily, I argue that the Mummies constantly restore these histories, often unconsciously, as a way to understand and legitimize their community. Because of the problematic histories of race, gender and class involved, however, an unintentional effect of this performance of history is the continued alienation of the parade community from the larger Philadelphia community, resulting in a cycle of attempted legitimization via Mummies performances and an even further alienation from the larger community. Thus, I argue that the Mummies’ unconscious performances of history and attempts to legitimize their parade via that history actually results in the opposite effect: an increasing confusion about the purpose and usefulness of the parade in Philadelphia.

#### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this study, I view the Philadelphia Mummies Parade as a performance from a cultural performance perspective. This perspective, based partly on Victor Turner’s anthropological and Richard Schechner’s dramaturgical work, sees culture as performance and understands lived, embodied experiences as performative in nature.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Schechner and Turner claim that bodily actions speak as communications of the internal functions of both an individual person and a community or communities (Schechner and Turner 100-1). Schechner calls these

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<sup>2</sup> For other work on communication as a performance see Carroll; McKenzie; and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

internal functions “restored behaviors,” meaning that within specific cultures and contexts, actions or communications both stem from and refer to past actions or communications (Schechner 28). These restored behaviors call attention to the fact that they have been done before, although with differences. By using this definition of performance, this study focuses on the generative nature of performance in general and this performance in particular. This perspective highlights the productive, rather than reproductive, potential of performance. Therefore, this research shows how the restored behaviors found in the parade not only define the Philadelphia Mummers Parade, but continually produce the history as a performance. In other words, the focus is on not only the explicit aesthetic performance of the parade itself, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the everyday performances that form the parade community and help to define the parade experience, both historically and contemporarily.

As Michael de Certeau, Luce Girard, and Pierre Mayol assert in *The Practices of Everyday Life*, “Culture is judged by its operations, not by the possession of products” (254). By expanding on the idea that internal workings of a culture, in this case the everyday performances of the Mummers, are at least as important as its external features, in this case the potentially problematic parade performances, I connect the cultural performance perspective to existing methods on the performance of community and the performance of history.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to study the parade and the community within and surrounding it, historically and contemporarily, I used ethnographic techniques of participant-observation and interviewing, as well as historiographic research methods. My research on the parade began informally in the spring of 2007. At that time, I began researching secondary sources on the parade, such as various histories and official tourism sites (e.g., Jennings; Welch; Laurie; Davis; Warner; Dubin; Davis and Haller; Mummers.com; Mummers Museum; “Mummers Parade”). In August of 2007,

I contacted a participant in the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association and began discussing plans to work with the group. My formal research spanned approximately fourteen months, including two parades. I began my formal research in December of 2007 and participated not only in the 2008 and 2009 parades, but also in the various events in the year between the parades. In addition to these informal observations and discussions, I conducted interviews with: Palma Lucas, the director of the Mummers Museum; John Lucas, the longtime captain of the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association and leader in the Mummers community; and Dunkin, a younger member of the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association.

As Patricia Anne Masters reminds us, "My understandings of why thousands of people march up Broad Street in funny costumes year after year would be incomplete without some level of participation in one of the clubs" (95). While I disagree with the implication that her research is complete *because* of her participation in the parade, she makes an important point about the significance of an ethnographic method. Ethnography endeavors to understand a particular culture, in this case that of the Mummers, through field methods such as observation, participation, and interviewing. In sum, things are learned by immersing oneself in a culture that cannot be learned otherwise. Based, in part, on the theories of Turner and Conquergood, ethnography stems from the understanding that cultures are socially constructed, so meanings in cultures are always multiple, partial, and subjective. Most importantly, the ethnographic method acknowledges that as the researcher, I am positioned as a part of this subjective, partial, and socially constructed culture, and therefore, my observations are filtered through a relatively biased perspective. As Conquergood explains, however, "Proximity, not objectivity, becomes an epistemological point of departure and return" (373). Therefore, in this method, the ethnographer gathers data through immersion in the culture. Through this participation in a culture, the perspectives of both the researcher and the subjects work together, resulting in conclusions that

recognize and acknowledge the partiality and subjectivity of any study. In dealing with a highly contested and often confusing subject such as the Mummers Parade, the ethnographic method has helped this study to mediate the partiality and subjectivity of the topic.

The historiographic method I use is that of performance genealogy, based largely on theories of Michel Foucault, Joseph Roach, and Diana Taylor. For this study, I have done two kinds of archival research. My primary source of archival research has been the archive located in the Mummers Museum. The museum houses an extensive archive including past costumes, articles about the parade, communications from former and present members, and objects of interest. These archives, however, were flooded in 2001, which resulted in a great loss of information. Additionally, the archives are essentially uncataloged. This lack of organization often made it difficult for me to find and organize data. Therefore, to supplement those documents, I also consulted the Historical Society of Pennsylvania archives for clues as to the different histories of the parade.

My archival research aided in creating a genealogical study of the Mummers Parade. Michel Foucault argues for a genealogical approach to history in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” explaining that this method “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal signification and ideal teleologies” (140). In other words, the genealogist grapples with the events of history without attempting to find and fix history in an origin story. Using Nietzsche’s work to support his theories, Foucault claims that the genealogist’s job is to “identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors . . . it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know, and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents” (146). Thus, genealogical research challenges the myth of a fixed history and focuses on the importance of cracks and fissures in history (146).

Additionally, my research follows Roach's outline of a genealogical method. Roach draws on Derrida and Foucault in fleshing out his methodology of performance genealogy. Roach uses Derrida's understandings that subjects are products of the competition with and between contemporary and historical meanings and subjects. This competition, for Derrida, is both regressive and evolutionary in that it recalls older meanings (regressive) and combines them with contemporary meanings to generate new understandings that are potentially better and more advanced (evolutionary). Roach also derives this understanding of history in part from Foucault's theories, arguing that in order to deal with this constantly morphing and elusive nature of any given subject in history, researchers should use what Roach calls performance genealogy.

A performance genealogy draws attention to the power of a performance by outlining its historical transmission. In order to frame this method, Roach introduces the concepts of surrogation and orature. First, the concept of surrogation, or the "doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins" (3), connects performance and history to Richard Schechner's idea of restored behavior. Roach explains that because memory and behaviors are restored partially—a group often tries to restore something it perceives to be the true origin, but fails because of the elusory nature of origins—genealogists can recognize dynamics of power via an analysis of surrogation. Additionally, the concept of orature, or "gesture, song, dance, processions, storytelling, proverbs, gossip, customs, rites, and rituals" (11), calls upon the idea that orality and literacy play off of each other and that, in history, bodies perform through archival texts. Through the use of orature, the genealogist can view the archive as a multidimensional, dynamic performance instead of a house of telos and origin. Thus, Roach's method has helped me challenge the repeated call for an origin story of the Mumpers, focusing instead on the ways the Mumpers have used their history to make sense of their community. In



choosing specific points of orature, this study has developed a multidimensional look into the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. I attempt neither to fix the history into a teleological tale nor to distance the present from the past. Instead, I use Roach's method to focus on implications of performing problematic histories in the present.

I take another important methodological cue from Diana Taylor in her work *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Taylor argues for a similar historiographic method as does Roach, but approaches that method from a different angle. She claims, "By shifting the focus from written to embodied culture, from discursive to performatic, we need to shift our methodologies" (16). She then proposes one such methodology by delineating between what she names the archive and the repertoire.

On one hand, the archive, for Taylor, is the stuff of written histories, "supposedly resistant to change" (19). Although the archive itself does not change, how society values the archive does. Additionally, things might disappear from or reappear within the archive over time. On the other hand, the repertoire "enacts embodied memory" (20). What Roach might call orature, the repertoire might disappear, but because it has never been fully captured via the archive, it cannot fully disappear. Instead, things of the repertoire can be replicated, and within this replication, the repertoire transmits "communal memories, histories and values from one group/generation to the next" (21). In the Mummers, the archival history has indeed disappeared and reappeared over time. Some information is just missing from the archive, despite all efforts to locate it. The pieces of the repertoire, or the parade and community performances, however, have acted as ties to the past. The Mummers have constantly re-presented these instances of the repertoire in their attempts to remain ever-connected to their archival histories.

Although Taylor's archive and repertoire are relatively separate entities in her method, in my study, the two bleed into each other. Taylor notes, "Even though the archive and the

repertoire exist in a constant state of interaction, the tendency has been to banish the repertoire to the past” (21). She goes on to argue for a renewed understanding of and interaction with the repertoire in studies of the performance of history. In my study, however, the interaction of the archive and the repertoire and the ability of the repertoire to affect the archive, and vice versa, are vital. The texts available to me within the archive were often affected by repertoire-based performances. For example, the Mumpers not only have the ability to control but also enact that control over the archival texts available to researchers, including myself. This repertoire-based performance of the archive therefore makes it difficult to compartmentalize issues of the archive and the repertoire. Instead in this study the two dance together, adding to the significance of how the Mumpers perform their history.

From her definitions of the archive and the repertoire, Taylor outlines a methodology. She focuses on what she calls “scenarios” in order to shy away from privileging texts and narratives, and thus “pay attention to milieu and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language” (28). In six points, Taylor argues for understanding the scenario. First, the research must outline the physical location or the scene, and second, embodied social actors. Third, this clear set up enables scenarios to refer to other scenarios via words and gestures. Fourth, by paying attention to how these scenarios are passed on or referenced via gestures, texts, or narratives, one can see the “multifaceted systems at work” (31). Fifth, Taylor’s understanding of the scenario asks that the researcher not distance herself from the scenario but, instead, “be there” (32). Sixth, she explains that the scenario is not mimetic but “works through reactivation rather than duplication” (32). Much like Schechner’s theory of restored behavior, Taylor argues that scenarios do not call up exact copies of their past forms. Instead, there is always a bit of a difference. This system, therefore, helped me to flesh out the ways contemporary parade performances use history. In analyzing the embodied and archival

aspects of the histories of race, gender, and class, and the way the archive and the repertoire interact and play with each other, I argue that the past scenarios constantly reappear in the present with slight differences. These differences and the specifics of the connections between the archive and the repertoire are what communicate the Mummies' understandings of their own histories and, therefore, their own community.

### SIGNIFICANCE

Turning to the significance of the site, limited breadth and depth of research exists on the Mummies Parade. In the back of E.A. Kennedy's recently published photo essay and history book on the Mummies, he lists the limited sources on the topic, commenting that "the history of the Mummies is for the most part an oral one" (181). Of the texts written on the Mummies, all of them include evolutionary histories stemming from Gary Jennings' 1966 and Charles E. Welch's 1970 seminal works (Jennings; Welch; Dubin; Kennedy; Masters). Additionally, chapters on the Mummies are included in larger works about Philadelphia and its citizens (Laurie; Warner; Davis and Haller). Again, each of these texts employs these earlier histories.

Three texts, however, stand out. First, Claire Sponsler's chapter entitled "Philadelphia's Mummies and the Anglo-Saxon Revival" in her larger text called *Ritual Imports: Performing Medieval Drama in America* provides a useful historiography of one thread of the parade. While this text attempts to understand the parade's history in a nuanced way, Sponsler is largely concerned with the past existence of the parade from an Anglo-Saxon perspective and fails to situate this research in a contemporary significance or within any other performance traditions.

Secondly, Patricia Anne Masters' *The Philadelphia Mummies: Building Community through Play* explores the Mummies from the sociological perspective of play. Masters thoroughly establishes her ethos in the study, pointing to the years of research leading up to the text, and the pages that follow exemplify a sociological look into community as an ahistorical,

cohesive, cooperative group of people. My study, however, is more concerned with how this parade is situated as a community performance and how the community uses its histories to understand that community. I argue that the Mummers are hardly ahistorical but instead morph and change through history. Understanding those changes is the key to my study.

Lastly, Susan G. Davis' text *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* points to important ways the communities of Philadelphia used parades to communicate and transmit power dynamics in the early 1800s. Davis' study is important in that it discusses how parades function in and as communities specifically within Philadelphia. In sum, Davis claims, "This case study of parades and ceremonies in early nineteenth century Philadelphia reveals how and why public events are problematic and significant for social history" (5). Davis deals with not only a similar general topic (parades) but also some similar specifics (race, gender, and class); however, she does not implicate the contemporary significance of parades and power in her study. Davis focuses on the early 1800s and does little to connect that history to current community performances. Additionally, her perspective is more centered around the city communities' understandings of the various parades and parade participants whereas my study focuses more on the parade participants' attempts to make sense of their own histories. In sum, although Davis' work is important and helpful to my study, it differs greatly in method and focus.

As Kennedy notes, the history of the Mummers has been largely oral, leaving a large hole in our understanding of the parade; or to put it more positively, leaving a wide open window for potential investigation. A lack of research does not a significance make, however. Therefore, the significance of this study to the field of Performance Studies goes back to what I explained to the captain of the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association: "I want to tell your story." I want to tell their stories, I should have said, and other stories. This research situates a particular parade into

multiple theoretical and practical performance conversations, opening the door to not only potential greater exposure but also more nuanced understandings of what it means to perform potentially problematic histories in contemporary performance practices. This connection reveals new ways communities use histories as everyday cultural performances.

An external view and popular perception of any parade is that the parade performance itself is somehow the end all and be all of the community. This could not be further from the truth with the Mummers. In reality, much of the performance happens in the other 364 days of the year and in the historicity of past parades. For the Mummers, various events and elements of the parade construct the community in the days leading up to the next parade or following the last one. Because of the significant financial and logistical costs and partially grassroots organizational aspects of the Mummers Parade, the community develops and flourishes in the days that surround parade day, thereby creating a compelling relationship with the larger urban community. The significance of the community performance lies in large part in this precarious position. Why is it that even though the saying goes, “On new years day, everyone is a Mummer,” the reality is that only a handful of people, including the Mummers themselves, actually understand the parade, its histories, or the community from which the parade comes?

In talking to other Philadelphians about the Mummers Parade, the most common reactions I have gotten involve either the assumption that it is a socially acceptable way for straight white men to dress up and wear sequins or that it lacks significance for the city as a whole. These assumptions point to the problematic use of history that lies within the community of the Mummers Parade. By looking beyond those assumptions and other previously researched theories about the function(s) of the Mummers, I rethink theories on the function of history in community via parade and everyday performances.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers!”

Because of the use of blackface minstrelsy in the parade’s past and the almost entirely white demographic of the community in the Mumpers Parade, I believe my study would be wholly incomplete without an intense discussion of these racial politics, both currently and historically. Most discussion about race in the Mumpers Parade views it through an evolutionary lens, meaning that racism was a part of the past but is no longer a problem. An evolutionary view of this history sets up a dangerous hierarchy, not only privileging contemporary ideas over those of the past, but also implying that we have moved beyond all problems and have left them in the past. Levine warns about this kind of top-down history saying that “the general movement [is] upward toward an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the past” (4). Rather than simply looking at different events, Levine argues, historians must look at the past in different ways, avoiding this top-down approach. Indeed, the Mumpers Parade has yet to completely move beyond issues of racism, yet all works on the parade indicate that racism has been eliminated. By using a performance genealogical approach, this chapter emphasizes the nuances of racial performance without making unhelpful blanket statements about the bigotry of the parade participants. In other words, I answer the question: How do the Mumpers use the history of race and racism to understand and legitimize their parade community?

As previously mentioned in the descriptions of the divisions, blackface performance is an important performance tradition prevalent in the history of the Mumpers Parade. According to John Marion:

Blackface makeup—burnt cork or charcoal—had been used by Mumpers since the earliest days, ‘the lampblack period.’ Blacks had, in fact, participated in the parade as Mummer clubs: in 1906 the Golden Eagle Club, then 40 years old and

exclusively black, fielded 300 marchers. But the last black groups to appear were in the late twenties. Times changed and by the mid-Sixties, the black community understandably took offense at the makeup, which today is no longer permitted.

(1)

This history gives birth to a completely different narrative within the history of the parade: that of African Americans. In telling the story of how blackface came to be banned different histories reveal themselves, further emphasizing the multiple and competing ancestries within the Philadelphia Mummers Parade.

In pinpointing an orature or scenario that teases out the racial tension and performances within the Mummers Parade, the song “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” came to the fore. This song was published in 1879 by James Bland, an African American minstrel, and is now known as the unofficial theme song of the Mummers Parade. While “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” was not Bland’s most popular song, it clearly has had a lasting influence on the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. Every Mummer wears golden slippers in the parade—the contemporary version of which involves spray painting shoes gold (Mummers.com). Additionally, the unofficial theme song has been embraced by the community and is performed at almost every Mummer event. Given the problematic racial history of the parade, it is compelling that the Mummers reappropriated an African American minstrel song in a way that has had such an important lasting effect.

The history of this song placed in conversation with other histories of racial performance in the parade tells a complex story of the issue of race in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. This chapter, therefore, begins with the song, “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers,” and follows various lines of inquiry of the performance of race. Weaving these threads together with theories on blackface performance and performance of race in history, such as those of Lott, Toll, Bean, and Roediger,

a tapestry of the performance of race unfolds. In sum, I argue that the Mumpers use what I call *strategic invisibility* in dealing with their histories of race.

### Real Girl Dances in Mumpers Throng

Just as the histories of race in the parade reveal one set of community performances, those of gender expose another important way the Mumpers negotiate their history. People often claim that on January 1<sup>st</sup> everybody is a Mumper, but Mumpers are classically known as men—men dressing as women. Historically, women’s participation in the parade has been limited and gone unseen. This invisibility has been buttressed by the explicit transgender nature of the parade performance. The men of the parade perform female impersonations, which at times emphasized a form of female impersonation that passed for a biological female, thereby adding to the significance of gender performance in the community. Within the parade, the performers create a juxtaposition with their passing form of female impersonations on one hand and the rules historically barring female participation on the other hand. This chapter, then, explores that juxtaposition and its implications for the community of the Philadelphia Mumpers Parade.

In the Philadelphia Mumpers Parade, women play an interesting and integral part. Despite an extremely important focus on many of the Mumpers performances as drag performances (men dressed as women), women were not permitted to march in the parade officially until the 1970s when two girls performed with one of the string bands. Perhaps because of the focus on drag performances, however, women were able to sneak into the parade throughout its history. One particular woman, Laura Lee, not only snuck into the parade in 1929 but also published a newspaper article on the experience. This article reveals multiple issues related to gender performance and the parade community by focusing the inquiry on how the aforementioned juxtaposition created an emphasis on propriety of gender performance.



Beginning with Laura Lee as a point of orature, this chapter encompasses various histories of female participation juxtaposed with the female impersonation performances by the men and the behind the scenes work by women. In the discussion, I incorporate theories on the gender performance and propriety such as those of Butler and de Certeau. In sum, I argue that the Mummers' use of this juxtaposition in history has created a struggle in their contemporary understandings of their community.

### King for a Day

The gender performance within the parade situated community identity into a system of propriety, whereas the performances of class focus on the commoditization of the parade and the community within it. The earlier parades brought out the carnivalesque in participants. Festivities were grassroots and supported by the parade community. Little money was required to be a Mummer in the 1800s, so the celebrations focused on other factors, such as creativity, performance, and community. As the Quakers and other more conservative city officials tried to rein in the Mummers celebrations, which were seen as rowdy, Philadelphians shifted their attention to possible benefits of the festivities. Toward the end of the 1800s, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* sponsored the parade via financial awards. This sponsorship focused on a rhetoric that claimed a more refined group of Mummers because of the financial sponsorship. The city quickly latched onto this idea, and the official Mummers Parade was born in 1901. This new manifestation of the Mummers, however, had a new focus: money.

The Mummers Parade has been an increasingly expensive endeavor for the participants and the city alike since the official sponsorship in 1901. Although early Mummers celebrations focused on a more grassroots community style of the performance, when the city officially adopted the parade, the attention of the larger city turned towards the financial cost of the Mummers' costumes and financial benefit to the larger community. This shift in attention laid

the groundwork for a steadily increasing focus on the Mummers as a wealthy, and therefore respectable, community of people. Within this shift, however, the Mummers continued to identify as a working class community. Therefore, the Mummers must negotiate their own historic understandings of their community as working class with the larger community's focus on the expense of their costumes.

Starting with the official city adoption of the parade, this chapter examines the immediate and extensive commoditization of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade and how this attention towards the financial costs of costumes attempted to control the lower class South Philadelphians participating in the parade. Relating this shift to the contemporary issue of money in the parade, I argue that the Mummers have had trouble negotiating their working class history and the city's focus on the expense of their parade.

In this chapter, I begin with the financial change in the parade performance and spiral out to the various ways the city sponsorship altered the performance of class in the community. Calling on theories of commoditization such as those of Gramsci, I set the stage for a discussion about identity, community, and class.

## LIMITATIONS

The histories of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade are extensive and far reaching over time, space, and subject. It is not my intention to cover these histories in a comprehensive fashion. Instead, I focus on particular histories with particular interest to the field of Performance Studies. Even within these focused histories, a great deal of information about the Mummers Parade, I discovered, is hidden, missing, or just plain incorrect; however, by allowing the writing and performance of the history to take the forefront, this study will reveal how this community understands itself via the histories it tells. Indeed, the limitations of my study allow it to stand out from other studies on the Mummers, and therefore, thrive. Other studies on the Philadelphia

Mummers Parade attempt to sum up the entire parade and its histories into one clear story or theory. This study, however, uses the limitations of information to speak about the creation of history in this particular community.

Additionally, this study has been limited by my inability to participate in different groups within the parade. When I attempted to start my research, I contacted every single Mummer group I could find. Only one group ever contacted me back. Therefore, my perspectives and personal histories are clearly limited and biased toward this particular group in the Fancy division. I did my best to mediate this limitation via my interviews and attendance at different Mummers events, such as string band concerts and beef and beer fundraisers at different clubhouses. Despite my extensive efforts to mediate the impact of this limitation, the bias remains in this document. In the end, however, it is important to note that history is full of bias, and this history is no different. Hopefully, this bias has acted as a benefit by emphasizing the historicity of the parade and how the writing and performing of history creates and maintains communities.

December 31, 2007; 1:15pm: I pull the cord on the bus and make my way toward the back door to exit. As the bus roars forward in front of me, I see a string band marching toward the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association clubhouse. The band is not dressed in anything special, though a few of the members are wearing their club sweatshirts and jackets. I stand there in awe, wondering what this display is all about.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

## CHAPTER TWO “OH, DEM GOLDEN SLIPPERS!”

### Race in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade

August 19, 2007; 8:30pm: I walk up to the woman who was pointed out to me and ask if she could direct me towards Dunkin. I had emailed nearly a dozen Mummers groups over the prior six months trying to find a group with whom to work. None had responded for months and months. Finally, I heard back from one of the groups via Myspace. Dunkin of Golden Sunrise New Year’s Association—a Fancy group— sent me an email. He had been affable via email and anxious to meet me, so he suggested that I come down to the string band concert at the Mummers Museum the Thursday that I was in town. Tonight is that night. I know nothing about him and only what I can glean from the association’s Myspace page about the group itself. As I wait for the woman’s granddaughter to get Dunkin, I watch and listen to the string band play. A few people dance and strut in front of the stage, and I make a note to myself about the generational diversity of the crowd. A few minutes later Dunkin arrives. He gives me a quick tour of the museum, a mini lesson in Mummers strutting, and then we return to the outside to watch the band play. Moments after we get back outside, the band conductor turns to the crowd and says, “Well, this song needs no introduction.” Dozens of audience members get up with enthusiasm and start dancing. Dunkin turns to me and says, “Do you know this song?” Embarrassed by the fact that I don’t know much about the culture of the Mummers yet, I say “no.” As he struts away to join the crowd in front of the stage, he calls, “It’s ‘Dem Golden Slippers!’”

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

“Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” by James Bland is the unofficial theme song of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade (“Mummers Parade”). While never a Mummer, Bland was an African American minstrel who composed this song as a parody of an African American spiritual. Early Mummers, largely white men, co-opted the song and it has been an integral part of the Mummers Parade for at least ninety years; however, the song and its composer remain relatively obscure in history. Furthermore, the recorded histories of the Mummers Parade provide little verifiable information about how the Mummers came to use the song or why the Mummers claim it as their unofficial theme song. The information that does exist about the song tends to privilege the histories of the white men who brought the song to the Mummers over the African

American lineage of the song; yet, it remains an important symbol of the parade community in the contemporary Mumpers, as the introductory excerpt from my field notes indicates.

Similarly, the Mumpers' performances stem from blackface minstrelsy, a performance genre that some theorists claim allowed Italian, Irish and Polish men to distance themselves from their ethnic minority status and essentially become white (e.g., Lhamon; Lott; Roediger). Minstrelsy was explicitly present in the parade until the 1960s and is implicitly present still. The contemporary Mumpers, however, largely ignore the history of blackface performance in the parade. Additionally, the parade community has been almost exclusively white for more than seventy-five years; yet, the written and oral histories of the parade do little to deal with this problematic racial past. Instead, the Mumpers treat the history of race and racism in the parade as a temporally limited problem or opt for a sort of strategic invisibility. In other words, the Mumpers attempt to distance the contemporary parade community from the problems associated with the racism of minstrelsy and other racial constructs in the parade's histories, while privileging the aspects of the history that support their own cultural legitimacy in Philadelphia. They pick and choose, often unconsciously, which histories they want to make invisible. In this way, the historicities of race in the Philadelphia Mumpers Parade represent one way the Mumpers attempt to make sense of their community's cultural stake in Philadelphia via the use of this aforementioned strategic invisibility. Thus, this study can benefit from an analysis of how race defines the parade community through history.

Contemporary race relations in the parade and between the parade and the city are tense in many ways. The present day parade has very few non-white participants. While locals of all races often know nothing about the parade, when people do discuss it, the racial tensions and racist performances are commonly the first problem to be remarked upon. Many of my friends and acquaintances have questioned my interest in the parade, citing its problematic racial

performances. A December 2007 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reviewed E.A. Kennedy's 2007 photo journalism book about the Mummers, specifically pointing out that Kennedy, an African American, has received a lot of questions from his African American colleagues and friends about his interest in the parade. The article reports, however, that Kennedy realizes that racism exists in the present-day parade, but that he "chides the 'white-liberal' media for dismissing the Mummers as a 'bunch of racist drunks'" (John-Hall).

Mummers I have interviewed, formally and informally, have defended the parade, claiming that it is neither racist nor racially exclusive. Yet, like Kennedy, I find it vital to acknowledge the racist past of the parade specifically and minstrelsy in general, while juggling the various aspects of the performance of race and racism within the contemporary Mummers Parade. Sweeping dismissal of the parade as racist may occlude the multiplicity of historical lines present within the historicity of the parade. The parade does have problematic relationships to race; however, dismissing the parade altogether because of this conflict only serves to whitewash the history of the parade. By generalizing the Mummers as a racist group of people or the parade as a racist practice without any acknowledgement of the complexities within the history we are committing an act Lawrence Levine warns about. He claims, "This is not to say that we must fragment every group we study to the point where generalizations become impossible, but if we generalize things we study right out of their complexity, we are doomed to futility" (12). In many ways, people studying or even observing the Mummers often struggle with the complexities of the ideas behind race in the parade. I struggle with those complexities in this chapter. I trudge forward though in order to understand the ways the Mummers community makes sense of and legitimizes itself via its histories.

Although there are many working definitions of race and racism, for purposes of my discussion here, I deal with these terms via Homi Bhabha's theories in *The Location of Culture*.

Bhabha focuses on a postcolonialist definition of racism, arguing that, “It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). In this way, Bhabha locates both oppression, or issues of racism, and freedom or agency within what he terms a “hybrid” (33). Melding Said, Foucault and Lacan, Bhabha explains that agency develops within an ambivalence or hybrid. A colonial master both distinguishes himself as a master and simultaneously needs the slave “Other” in order to be recognized as the master; however, within this very discursive system, the slave’s power exists to resist or disrupt the power dynamic. According to Bhabha, “The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (112). For Bhabha, power relies heavily on this sort of discursive ambivalence. By using Bhabha’s definitions, this work can avoid a binary driven argument of white/black or racist/not racist and focus on how the Mummies use invisibility strategically through the discursive process of performing history.

Unfolding a genealogy of race and racism within the Philadelphia Mummies Parade leads down many confusing and incomplete threads. As previously mentioned, the history surrounding James Bland and “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” is full of holes. From Bland’s song to the histories of minstrelsy, opinions, facts, and memories reveal contradictions and conflicts. Moving from the specific histories of James Bland and the Fisk Jubilee Players who wrote the spiritual upon which Bland played, to the general histories of minstrelsy and the connections between minstrelsy and the parade, the genealogy becomes even more complex. This chapter, however, uses the holes within this complex history of race in the Philadelphia Mummies Parade in order to point to one way the parade community makes sense of itself. By inquiring about how the unofficial theme song and the practice of minstrelsy connect to the Mummies’ attempts to gain

white racial status and a cultural legitimacy in Philadelphia, I neither defend nor chastise the current parade participants. Instead, I focus on how these elusive threads of the history of race and the concerns about racism function within the parade community's attempts to make sense of itself. In sum, I argue that the Philadelphia Mummers Parade community, which once used minstrelsy to become a culturally legitimate community, has attempted to restore only certain aspects of the performance genre via strategic invisibility. By holding on to certain aspects of its history of race (namely how minstrelsy helped the city to view the Mummers as white and therefore legitimate), but ignoring other aspects (namely the racism of blackface performance and the lack of racial diversity in the parade), the community has attempted to mitigate the problems associated with race in its past. Because of this use of strategic invisibility, however, the Mummers have alienated the larger community of Philadelphia, which reads the Mummers' responses as apathetic and therefore racist. Thus, as the Mummers often unconsciously use the invisibility of African Americans in their history to buttress their claims of cultural legitimacy in the city, they simultaneously restore the problematic racist history from the early days of the parade, thereby hurting their contemporary community. In order to begin this part of the study, I turn to the one of most invisible aspects: James Bland.

January 1, 2008; 1:30pm: After getting a late start due to rain, the members of our parade association are anxious to put on a show. Due to high winds, we put on our back-pieces half way through the parade, and the group comes alive. We dance; we smile; we spin around to show off the intricate work of our costumes. The string band music accompanying us through a stereo system plays all of the regular songs and we each find our own rhythm, but when it gets to "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers" the group seems to come together. Everyone starts to sing, but I don't know the words. I strut and dance anyway, trying to play along with the group's veterans.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

Some music historians know James Bland as "The world's greatest minstrel man" or "The prince of colored songwriters" (Hullfish 1), but he is completely unknown to most



laypeople. Bland was born in Flushing, NY, in 1854 to a free black family with a rare educated background for his day. Allen Bland, his father, attended Oberlin College and graduated from Wilberforce University. After Allen graduated from college, the family, including James, moved to Philadelphia. Histories about Bland claim that James first heard an elderly black street musician playing the banjo in Philadelphia, and fell in love with the instrument. James quickly took to the banjo and learned mostly by ear through his teen years. After the Civil War, Allen Bland attended Howard University Law School and became the first African American in the United States Patent Office (Hall; “James Bland”; Valions.org). James also attended Howard University and soon either dropped out or graduated in 1873 and began to follow his dream of performing. Reports conflict about whether or not Bland graduated at nineteen or dropped out of college, but all accounts agree that he started performing professionally as a minstrel soon after his time at Howard (“James Bland”; Toll).

In 1878, Bland published his first minstrel song, “Carry Me Back to Old Virginy.” The publication of the song marked the beginning of a creative explosion for Bland, and between 1879 and 1881 he wrote hundreds of songs. Music historian William Hullfish claims that Bland wrote 600 to 700 songs in those years, but that only a small portion of the songs remain. Specifically, Hullfish says, “twenty are contained in *The James A. Bland Album of Outstanding Songs* . . . the Library of Congress holds the sheet music of thirty-seven. The Newberry Library has eleven, including two not found in the Library of Congress” (1-2). As certain aspects of Bland’s history (namely inscribed records of his songs) are missing here, one can begin to see how this invisibility might play into the later function of said history in the Mummies’ Parade. The invisibility of the history upon which the Mummies community is built certainly affects the way that history functions in the parade community.

Bland joined a popular and well-financed national touring minstrel company, Haverly's Colored Minstrels, in 1880. A couple of years later, he went to Europe with the troupe and stayed overseas after the rest of the troupe returned to the States. This time was the peak of Bland's popularity in both the United States and Europe, and he reportedly earned \$10,000 annually, an astounding sum for any minstrel, especially one of color ("James Bland").

Bland returned to the United States in the 1890s but his career quickly went downhill because, according to critics and historians, Bland's music no longer reached American musical tastes, and the old minstrel shows were losing their audiences to Vaudeville, variety shows, and musical theater (Toll 251). Bland refused to switch performance styles, as did many other minstrels, and instead decided to return to Europe where his career continued to fade. He left Europe for good in 1901 but could find no jobs in New York, so he moved to Philadelphia for a job with one of the nation's last resident minstrel shows: Dumont's Minstrels ("James Bland"). I question this reasoning behind Bland's career demise, however. If his music lacked popularity in the United States, why was one of his songs picked up some ten years later by the Philadelphia Mummers and quickly adopted because of its popularity? Bland's history is again clearly incomplete here. According to Phelan, "The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered" (147). Bland becomes the object that disappears in favor of the song—the subject. This switch-a-roo points to a whitewashing in history, an ignoring of the man in favor of his work that can be co-opted and used in the Mummers Parade and in the parade's history.

In the 1900s, Bland's health declined and on May 5, 1911, James Bland died at the age of fifty-seven, obscure and unnoticed, of tuberculosis. No one marked Bland's death publicly, and no obituary ran in his name. He was buried in a pauper's grave in Merion, Pennsylvania, about twenty miles outside of Philadelphia. Bland was all but forgotten in the early 1900s ("James

Bland”). On March 13, 1914, an article that ran in the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* entitled “Songs We Used to Sing and Whistle” reminded readers of the song and its lyrics, but did not refer to James Bland as its composer (7). Bland’s grave soon met the fate of most pauper’s graves—grown over with weeds and grass.

According to the Virginia Lions Club archival record, nobody took an interest in Bland’s life again until the 1930s. A quarter of a century after Bland’s death, James Francis Cooke, editor of *The Étude*, a popular music magazine, began receiving many inquiries about Bland (valions.org).<sup>1</sup> These questions prompted Cooke to begin research on Bland. In his research, he found that Bland was indeed a real person (previously he thought Bland might be a pseudonym for Stephen Foster, a white minstrel composer), and after talking to one of Bland’s sisters, Cooke found Bland’s grave in Merion, PA. Determined to remind the world of Bland’s contribution, and prompted by one of the composer’s songs, “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” Cooke joined with the Lions Club of Virginia to remind the world of Bland. In 1940 the group succeeded in getting “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny” adopted as the Virginia state song. The song was the state song from 1940 to 1997 when it was retired because the Virginia Senate argued that the lyrics were considered offensive to African Americans (valions.org).

The debate about the song relied heavily on a kind of strategic privileging of certain historical information. The state of Virginia originally changed the title of his song to “Carry Me Back to Old Virginia” so as to minimize the offensive nature of this past. In the early 1990s, however, a movement began to remove the song because the lyrics seemed offensive (valions.org). These debates focused on specific bits of history while leaving out others. Although I do not argue that this form of strategic invisibility was altogether conscious, it does point to one way contemporary debates about histories show a clear privileging of certain

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<sup>1</sup> The Virginia Lions Club does not document from whom or where these inquiries came.

information over other information. Thus, this debate exemplifies another situation in which white men have tried to work with Bland's history for their own benefit—a situation that dominates in this study of race in the Mummers Parade.

While much of this history involves seemingly small details, these different accounts or facts remind me that this history is often messy and incomplete. “Truth is itself a representation,” (13) according to Pollock, so from the very beginning of this study, this history plays trickster. Bland's history is wrought with stories involving white men saving him, yet written history of Bland himself remains sparse. Perhaps in many ways his life, like his songs, is speckled with double-meaning. To the insider, his songs were parodies making fun of whites (Hullfish 6). Perhaps his life also strategically relied upon insider knowledge or the strategic use of invisibility, but history has left that invisibility to the unwritten repertoire.

According to William Hullfish, Bland's songs can be broken into various genres including secular, sacred, and anti-slavery; however, many of the songs within these genres were parodies of other previously published songs, adding an especially slippery dynamic to any attempt to categorize and analyze his work (2-8). Within Bland's rich musical and performance career, “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” counts as one of his imitation songs (Hullfish 8). The song on which he based this composition was originally composed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and published a year or two before Bland's version (Library of Congress). While no clear record exists of Bland's interactions or potential crossings with the Fisk Jubilee Singers, it is highly likely that he saw them perform during the early 1870s, many years before either song was published (Hullfish; Library of Congress). Bland also probably knew the song from other contacts. Even though he was born to free parents, Bland undoubtedly had exposure to African American spirituals. Levine points out that “[Negro spirituals] were collected by the hundreds directly from slaves and freedmen during the Civil War and the decades immediately following”

(48). During Bland's rise to minstrel stardom, he most likely had numerous chances to hear and learn "Golden Slippers" (Hullfish 5-8), yet much of this history is missing or incomplete.

Therefore, in order to show the way this missing information functions in the Mummers' history, this study must move on to a discussion about the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

"We stand on the shoulders of the original jubilee singers, continuing their legacy, as we sing Negro Spirituals" (Fisk Jubilee Singers).

The Fisk Jubilee Singers came from Fisk University, which was founded in Nashville in 1866. Fisk was the first American university to offer a liberal arts education to "young men and women irrespective of color" (Fisk Jubilee Singers). Five years after the school's founding it was having major financial problems. To remedy the situation, George L. White, Fisk's treasurer and music professor, developed a choral ensemble of students who would tour to earn money for the university. The group left campus in 1871 to tour the US and eventually Europe (Fisk Jubilee Singers).

The group started touring in small towns. Their early audiences gave mixed reviews of the performances because the singers were not minstrel performers, as were popular for the day; however, the group continued and started to perform in larger cities. The group's legend has it:

One early concert in Cincinnati brought in \$50, which was promptly donated to victims of the notorious 1871 fire in Chicago. When they reached Columbus, the next city on tour, the students were physically and emotionally drained. Mr. White, in a gesture of hope and encouragement named them "The Jubilee Singers," a Biblical reference to the year of Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 25. (Fisk Jubilee Singers)

The group's name has importance because it was also intended to mark the difference between the Fisk singers and the minstrel performers.

Rumor has it that George White, the group's leader, intentionally chose not only the group's name, but also various performance styles so as to distinguish between his group and minstrel performers. For example, he chose the name, as mentioned above, to allude to the Bible, a relatively clear strategic move. Additionally, he cut their performances and songs to an almost minimal structure in order to emphasize a somber and serious nature. In an article about James Bland's music, the author refers to John Work's comments that "George White, treasurer of the university and founder of the Fisk Jubilee Singers 'strove for an art presentation' and he 'eliminated every element that distracted' from the spiritual" (qtd. in Hullfish 5). In this way, the Fisk Jubilee Singers clearly attempted to distinguish themselves from African American minstrel performers of the day.

Although it is difficult to speculate why this group chose a more serious performance style as a way to make this distinction, a recent PBS documentary on the group notes:

The Fisk University Jubilee Singers was the first group to publicly perform the songs of slaves and they shared them with the world. When the Fisk Jubilee Singers first performed in the late 1800s, they sang ballads and patriotic anthems; it was their director, George White, who suggested that they sing the songs of their ancestors. The group was hesitant at first to expose this sacred music but agreed to add a few spirituals to their program. The music was well-received, often moving audiences to tears. With their performances, the Jubilee Singers were able to keep alive these songs of the past and reveal the emotions and strong faith of the African American slave. (Ward)

The group was, however, always in control of what songs they revealed. As with much of the history of African American spirituals, the use of certain songs was strategic with the Fisk group. Lowenthal writes extensively about African American spiritual and folk songs arguing that,

“music has always provided one of the primary means for transcending the restrictions imposed by the external, and even internal censors” (100). In revealing these songs to white audiences, the Fisk singers could control what forms of African American culture white audiences could access and therefore parody. The Fisk group’s strategies reflect Bhabha’s theories, however, that:

What these repeated negotiations of identity dramatize, in their elision of the seeing eye that must contemplate what is missing or invisible, is the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision. (66)

In other words, the Fisk group attempted to grapple with their identity as African Americans by holding on to their power of that representation. After performing these songs, though, the singers encountered new competition with the performers from which they clearly sought to distinguish themselves: the minstrels.

Although the word *jubilee* was originally intended to set the Fisk group apart from blackface minstrels, it was soon also adopted in the names of several minstrel troupes (Lott). Likewise, though the Fisk group was accepted as a group of talented singers, much of its legacy involves parodies written from the group’s songs. James Bland’s “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” is just one example. The Fisk song was not published until 1880, whereas the Bland song was published in 1879. The Fisk song is the original, so it had presumably been performed for some time before it was published. Bland’s song explicitly announces itself as a parody in one of the verses and clearly refers to the Fisk performance as the spiritual original. Bland’s song soon outstripped the Fisk song in popularity, and now people tend to think of “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers” as the original and the Fisk spiritual as some kind of variant (Library of Congress).

In consulting the two versions, one can easily see the differences. The Fisk song lyrics state:

What kind of shoes you goin' to wear?  
Golden slippers!  
What kind of shoes you goin' to wear?  
Golden slippers!  
Golden slippers I'm bound to wear,  
To outshine the glittering sun.  
Oh, yes, yes, yes my Lord,  
I'm going to join the Heavenly choir.  
Yes, yes, yes my Lord,  
Soldier of the cross. (Library of Congress)

As do other spirituals, this song explicitly refers to meeting God. Levine notes that spirituals are often considered sorrowful, and while there are definitely aspects of sorrow within these songs, the sorrow is never permanent. Explaining, "The religious music of slaves ... is pervaded by a sense of change, transcendence, ultimate justice, and personal growth," (52) Levine argues that slave songs illustrate a personal closeness with God and the potential of freedom. The tune is a somber one, becoming more upbeat when discussing meeting God in lyrics such as, "I'm going to join the Heavenly choir" (Library of Congress). Hullfish supports this observation in his discussion about Bland's parody of the song (5).

The Bland version differs most remarkably in this personal connection with God and the impending transcendence. Bland's song comments that the singer will not be preparing for heaven anytime soon; rather he will use the golden slippers to celebrate life in the current moment. These lyrics point to the parody by referring to the original version and then changing the outcome or emphasis via humor (Hullfish 8). Bland's lyrics are as follows:

Oh, my golden slippers am laid away, Kase I don't 'spect to wear 'em till my  
weddin' day,  
And my long-tail'd coat, dat I loved so well, I will wear up in de chariot in de  
morn,  
And my long white robe dat I bought last June, I'm 'gwine to git changed Kase it  
fits too soon,



And de ole grey hoss dat I used to drive, I will hitch him to de chariot in de morn  
Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers!  
Golden slippers I'm gwine to wear, becace dey look so neat;  
Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers!  
Golden slippers Ise gwine to wear, To walk de golden street. (Library of  
Congress)

Bland's version of the song employs similar images as the original song, but deemphasizes the journey in favor of the present moment. In doing so, it reveals itself as a parody of the original song (Hullfish 8).

The importance of the Fisk group's history centers on the ways they used their songs to communicate strategically, and the ways their history has likewise been promoted strategically. For example, despite the fact that the African American spiritual singers sought to use their popularity to reveal only certain songs, the African American minstrels were able to use the invisibility that stemmed from that strategy to their advantage. Because only live audiences were familiar with the Fisk group's version of the song, Bland was able to publish his song first, so marking it as the historic original. Additionally, I specifically mark much of this information as rumored or according to legend so as to emphasize that it is based on secondary sources which may or may not be correct. I found the Fisk group's histories on their own website. While I attempted to confirm this information via primary sources, news coverage of African American activity was limited during the 1800s and early 1900s. Thus, the invisibility of much of this history has affected the ways it continues to be used. Bland parodied the Fisk song as an African American Minstrel song, thereby subordinating the original Fisk song. When the Mummies appropriated Bland's song for the parade, the history of Bland's song was likewise subordinated. Clearly, the invisibility of much of this archival history has had a lasting affect. As Taylor explains, "Insofar as it constitutes materials that seem to endure, the archive exceeds the live" (19). The Mummies have unconsciously used the endurance of certain parts of the archive to

write their community's history so as to privilege their own legitimacy over the potential problems of appropriation and racism here. Therefore, I look next at the way the song entered the Mummers Parade and how this entry exemplifies the strategic invisibility I discuss in this chapter.

December 30, 2007; 4:30pm: I stand outside the clubhouse and put my boots on a piece of scrap wood. I shake the can of spray paint, push the button on top and spray metallic gold paint on my old steel toe boots. My boots become gold before my eyes. I pause to let my finger rest, shake the can again, and spray the boots some more with my other hand. A group of men walk by, and say, "Those are some gold boots!" I laugh along with them and continue to spray my boots. Chuck, the assistant captain of our association, comes outside to smoke a cigarette. Thus far we have had little to no communication. He is a man of few words. He looks at me as I paint and says, "Looks like you are all set to strut up Broad in your Golden Slippers!" I smile at the subtle acceptance in his voice and continue to spray the boots.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

While contemporary Mummers often know the tune to "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers," and always wear a contemporary version of golden slippers in the parade, this knowledge and attire were not always built into the parade. As are the histories of the song, its composer, and the song upon which it was based, "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers'" entry into the Mummers Parade and its adoption by hundreds of thousands of Mummers as the unofficial theme song are cloaked in mystery and rumor. The histories of the adoption of the song, however, connect both the practice of minstrelsy to the parade and the various historical threads dealing with race to contemporary epistemologies of cultural legitimacy.

In the early years of the competitive manifestations of parade, brass bands provided the music for the Mummers, as opposed to the string bands that play today. From 1895, the first year that prize money was offered, to 1905, only one string band marched in the parade, and therefore encountered no direct competition. According to Hansberry, in 1905 a new string band challenged the single band tradition, marched in the parade, and first played "Oh, Dem Golden

Slippers” (38). Charles Dumont, leading this coup as a veteran Mummer, had already marched as a Comic. In 1905 he marched as a Fancy, accompanied by the string band playing “Oh, Dem Golden Slippers,” and subsequently won first prize in the Fancy division. While Hansberry reports this information, primary texts, such as newspaper articles in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* completely contradict her claim. Particularly, newspaper reports point to William Waltman as the Fancy division winner in 1905 (“Monarch Momus”). To continue this interesting contradiction in the history, Hansberry claims that the song immediately became a Mummer staple because of its upbeat tempo and parodic lyrics (Hansberry 39). Although Hansberry makes the claim that the song was an immediate hit, newspaper articles and other primary sources again indicate that the song was not adopted until the 1920s.

If Hansberry’s reports are incorrect, however, they still reveal an interesting attempt to connect the Mummies and the world of minstrelsy. Charles Dumont’s uncle, Frank, ran the popular and successful Dumont’s Minstrels Theatre: an important theatre in the history of minstrelsy. Hansberry indicates that Charles most likely first heard the song when working backstage at his uncle’s theatre, where James Bland, the song’s composer, performed (39). Hansberry neither specifies a timeframe for Bland’s work at Dumont’s minstrels nor indicates any sources that show that Bland worked there prior to the song’s debut in the parade. Through my research of minstrel performance posters in Frank Dumont’s scrapbook collection, however, I have found that Bland probably worked with Dumont starting in 1901 upon his return from Europe. Regardless, again this history is marked by invisibility and missing information. Hansberry’s claim labels Charles Dumont and therefore Frank Dumont as the major connectors between the song and the parade and in doing so strategically uses this history. Frank Dumont is indeed a source of great legitimization for the tradition of minstrelsy and is therefore one way the Mummies’ legitimacy is bolstered by strategic invisibility.

“Frank Dumont Dies as Curtain Rises: Dean of Blackface minstrelsy stricken with sudden heart attack” (“Frank Dumont Dies”).

Frank Dumont is a name known to very few, even within theatre scholarship circles. As with much of this history, his contribution has been all but lost to the past. Frank Dumont was born in 1848 in New York to French immigrants. He grew up at the peak of minstrel performance in New York and was an official performer with Christy’s Minstrels by 1862. He did not stay with Christy’s long, moving on to work with Arlington’s and Donniker’s Minstrel groups that same year (Historical Society of Pennsylvania 2).

In 1880 Dumont moved to Philadelphia with his family. Five years later, he bought the famous Eleventh Street Theatre in which to hold his minstrel performances. He held famous and successful minstrel performances there for more than twenty-five years. In 1911 he sold the theatre and bought the nearby Dime Museum, changing its name to Dumont’s Minstrels.<sup>2</sup> Dumont managed the theatre until his death just before the curtain rose one night in 1919 (“Frank Dumont Dies”). After his death, his wife kept the theatre alive until 1929 when the theatre burned down, at which time it was one of the last remaining minstrel theatres in the United States (Historical Society of Pennsylvania 2).

Frank Dumont was not only a minstrel troupe manager but also a talented performer and writer of both performances and scholarly works about minstrelsy. His resumé of performances, jokes, burlesques, and musicals is extensive (Tompkins and Kilby 219). In 1899, Dumont published a book entitled *The Witmark Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia*, in which he instructed would-be minstrels on the art of blackface application as well as joke-telling and performance choreography. Additionally, the book served as a general reference list for minstrels both new and old. In a similar vein Dumont published numerous histories of

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<sup>2</sup> In the early 1900s, before Dumont bought it, the Dime Museum held viewings of films of the Mummies Parades for those people who could not make the live performances (“New Years Shooters at the Dime”).

minstrelsy of varying length. For example, in “The Origin of Minstrels,” published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1896, he traces the performance genre back to 1843.

When Dumont died, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published numerous articles on his death. For example, the headline that begins this section called out to readers the day after his death; announcing his fall at the rise of the curtain was front page news. Five days of death notices followed that article.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, an article discussing Dumont’s funeral told of thousands of mourners and thousands more audience members at Dumont’s Minstrel Show that month (“Funeral Services”). One article spoke of the large estate of \$30,000 he left to his widow (“Dumont left”), and yet another opinion piece waxed poetic about Dumont’s influence on the article’s author and the theatre community in general (“In the Spotlight”).

Dumont undoubtedly had a huge effect on the city of Philadelphia and the world of minstrelsy, yet he rarely appears in various histories of the art itself. None of the books devoted to the history of minstrelsy mention his name. The information I found about Dumont relied almost completely on primary sources, only a paragraph or two about his work in online minstrel song references (Tompkins and Kilby 219), as well as the Pennsylvania Historical Society’s “author information” page accompanying his scrapbook collection (Historical Society of Pennsylvania). His work, especially his various histories of minstrelsy, supports a strategic invisibility in the performance of history in the Mummers Parade. Despite the lack of information in theoretical texts on minstrelsy, Dumont’s legacy is hardly invisible. The Mummers’, however, do not connect their history to his, even though he most likely brought the parade’s unofficial theme song to the Mummers. While I cannot assume the reasoning behind the

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<sup>3</sup> Judging from my research in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from the late 1800s to 1921, death notice numbers appear to be directly proportional to the economic standing of the deceased. For example, deaths of shop owners tend to be followed by three days of death notices, whereas factory workers’ deaths were marked with only one notice, if any. In all of my research, Dumont was the only person to receive five days of notices plus numerous other articles discussing him, his estate, and his influence in the city and on minstrelsy.

Mummers' lack of acknowledgement of Dumont, I find it interesting that this connection is missing from the histories the Mummers tell.

At this intersection, an important dynamic becomes clear. Although the Mummers use "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers" as their unofficial theme song, and the song comes from minstrelsy via Charles Dumont, the Mummers only reveal parts of that history. The part the Mummers leave out involves the important contributions of African Americans in the parade's history and the subsequent alienation of those African Americans via minstrelsy and in the parade. The part they use focuses on the way minstrelsy helped them to become legitimate in Philadelphia. Thus, I turn now to the presence and absence of African American Mummers as well as the presence and strategic invisibility of blackface minstrelsy in the parade's history.

January 1, 2007; 10:45am: My mom and I stop alongside the street to take a few pictures of the comic wenches strutting by. One group of wenches walks by in blue skirts with pink and blue poke-a-dot umbrellas in hand. I notice a couple of women with children in front of us clad in stars and stripes patriotic bandannas and shirts. Overhearing their conversation, I start to suspect that they are related to some of the Mummers. When the next group of comics arrives, my suspicions are confirmed. This comic group is huge with at least 200 men and boys strutting down Broad Street in American-themed stars and stripes. About midway through the group, a man struts right up to the women and children in front of us. The women and children spectators greet the husband/father participant and the performer takes pictures with his children before dancing off with the rest of the group. I lean over to my mom to tell her that I got a great close-up photo of the guy. At the time, I do not even notice his makeup.

January 1, 2007; 6:45pm: When I arrive back to my mom's house later that night, far away from the beer drinking teens and "you guys" speaking South Philadelphians, I realize what that picture reveals. As I skim through the pictures, sighing at my horrible photography skills, I notice that the man in that particular photo seems to have different makeup on than everyone else in his association. This difference didn't strike me during the parade. I didn't even think twice about the makeup while watching the present-moment spectacles of the parade. As I examine the photo in my mom's office, however, I realize that the man is wearing blackface. I scan my memory, and realize that many of the comic performers were in blackface. Even with my intense stare, I had not picked up on this rather obvious detail. Now in the comfort of my mom's office, I wonder what else my gaze missed.

– Excerpts from author's field notes

Two major offenses are commonly cited against the Mummers as related to race relations: A general lack of African American participation, and the very obvious use of blackface minstrel performance. Blackface was an official tradition in the Mummers Parade from the beginning of city sponsorship to 1964 when official city policy ruled it out in response to intense protesting by civil rights organizations. A few associations disbanded in response to the new rule. Others blatantly disregarded the ruling and continued with the practice, but the actual practice of formal blackface performance most likely faded out of the parade slowly through the late 1960s rather than immediately in response to the new ordinance (Marion 2). According to John Marion, “Blackface makeup—burnt cork or charcoal—had been used by Mummers since the earliest days, ‘the lampblack period.’ Times changed and by the mid-sixties, the black community understandably took offense at the makeup, which today is no longer permitted” (1). Most histories about banning of blackface in the parade treat the subject as a temporally limited problem. Marion’s statement is a perfect example of the kind of rhetoric that attempts to isolate the issue to a specific and limited time period. While he acknowledges that blackface has been used from the very beginning of the parade, he goes on to indicate that “times changed” and so too did the tradition. I argue, however, that the tradition did not completely disappear, but simply morphed to accommodate new rules. Additionally, Marion’s history acknowledges the use of blackface performance but does not touch on the issue of racially diverse participation in the early parades; something I find vital to understanding the Mummers.

African American groups joined in on the festivities from the earliest days of the parade. In 1906, the Golden Eagle club strutted up Broad Street as an all-black group consisting of 300 African American men (Hansberry 41). One can assume that, due to its name, the Golden Eagle group was from the east side of Broad Street, a neighborhood historically populated by African Americans (Hansberry 41). Their participation could very well have been a strategic territorial

move, because Dubin indicates that “South Philadelphia was the city’s most impoverished area, and blacks were the poorest of the poor” (65). In fact, numerous riots over space occurred in Philadelphia, including multiple race riots from 1832 to 1849 and again in 1871 (Dubin 23-65). If the performance of race in the Mummers community is one that attempts to claim cultural legitimacy, these early groups, both black and white, had a clear stake in the claim of cultural legitimacy of Mummers’ tradition because of their extensive presence in early celebrations. The first year that the Golden Eagle Club marched, they claimed to have started forty years earlier in some of the earliest days of Philadelphia Mumming, though newspaper reports only confirm their existence back to 1898. Judging from the lack of representation of other black cultural events, however, it’s highly unlikely that the newspaper would have covered the group’s dealings in the post-Civil War years. Regardless, from the very first mention of their group in primary source materials, they were said to consist of a minimum of one hundred men, and were an important group in the tradition (“Mummers Danced”).

Perhaps the most important and legendary African American Mummer group was the O.V. Cato New Year’s Association. Named after Octavius Cato, a famous African American civil rights activist and educator who was shot in 1871 while on his way to vote, the group was quite large and often successful. Rumor has it that the Cato club prepared to take top prize in 1929, equipped with 300 men. Due to political drama about that year’s parade, another group was given top prize. The Cato club, according to word of mouth, never marched again (Welch 115). Another possibility is that the group could not afford to march in future years, due to the Great Depression. E.A Kennedy makes this important connection between race and class issues claiming, “African American Mummers enjoyed that kind of camaraderie before the Great Depression of the 1930s wiped out the most vibrant clubs” (John-Hall). Many clubs returned after World War II, but African Americans never played a large part in the festivities again.



It is hard to say whether or not race or class played a larger role in the decline in racial diversity in the parade. Dubin notes that the early days of the Mummers had less to do with ethnic, gender or racial lines and more to do with coming from South Philadelphia. He claims, “It had to do with making your own fun, because you couldn’t afford to buy enjoyment. You had to create it” (39). Mumming remains an expensive and time consuming activity in which not everyone has the luxury to participate. The conspicuous absence of African Americans from the stories told about the Mummers and in the written histories, however, indicates that financial cost was not and is not the only factor.

This singular financial reasoning reads as an excuse throughout my research. In interviews with the Mummers, every single white person who would speak to me about race has claimed that African Americans do not participate because of the costs associated with starting a group. Once a group has established itself, it tends to recycle and reuse costumes, an important cost-cutting strategy. The early years of any group, however, can be quite costly, so this suggestion is not completely senseless. A more complex set of details might be more likely, though. The financial reasoning seems to point to stories that are not being told in the narrative of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. As Paul Connerton asserts, “Different details will emerge [in the oral history of subordinate groups] because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home” (19). In telling the story of how African Americans dropped out of participation and how blackface came to be banned, different narratives and different histories are revealed, further emphasizing the multiple and competing ancestries within the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. I argue, too, that these histories give light to ways history is made visible strategically in the parade. For example, the Mummers tend to focus on the fact that African Americans might have lacked the funds, instead of revealing other problematic constructs of race in the parade’s history.

The absence of African Americans from the parade went on silently for almost thirty-five years, at least according to archival reports. During this time, no exclusively black groups marched in the Mummers Parade, but the use of minstrel performance styles, particularly blackface performance, continued. In 1963, Elias Myers, the parade director for the city, announced a new rule: blackface makeup was no longer permitted by the Mummers. The men of the Mummers, especially the comics, were furious. They protested outside Myers' residence, and he quickly retracted the rule. Instead, he said that blackface would be permitted as long as its purpose was for character development rather than the denigration of a particular ethnic group. According to Welch, no one was happy with this ruling (152).

The NAACP took the matter to the Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia, asking them to ban the use of blackface makeup. The makeup was banned, and white resistance grew in response to the new rule. Rumors spread that African Americans were planning on "importing" friends from New York and Washington, DC, and that the blacks would protest as snipers from the rooftops (Welch 153).

The parade was postponed that January 1<sup>st</sup> due to weather, but the following Saturday, January 4, 1964, more than 3000 police officers lined Broad Street. There were relatively few incidents, but the Mummers marched in silence through the largely black neighborhoods in South Philadelphia. One group sat down on Broad Street to protest, claiming that if the African Americans were going to sit down in City Hall, the Mummers would sit down on Broad Street. The group chanted, but police quickly arrived to keep the parade moving. After the men returned to Two Street, however, blackface makeup also returned and the Mummers claimed victory over the battle against blackface.<sup>4</sup> When the Mummers were in their own territory, that of Two Street,

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<sup>4</sup> The Two Street celebration is an important community celebration that occurs after the main parade on South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. I will come back to the Two Street celebration in Chapter Four when discussing the performance of class.

they reverted back to their preferred performance style, reinforcing a kind of community ownership over blackface performance (Welch 154). This strategy of marking their protest with silence in specific locations and on Two Street buttresses my argument that the Mummers use strategic invisibility to make sense of their community. Rather than protesting by cancelling the parade, the Mummers protested invisibly at points and silently reverted back to their preferred performance of blackface when in their own community space.

The following year, the ban on blackface makeup was strictly enforced. In 1965, there was far less tension. The city employed only 1500 police officers, and there seemed to be no problems. Interestingly, the performers chose two tactics in order to deal with the new ban on blackface makeup. The first method was to wear no makeup at all. Second, many of the Comic wenchers matched the makeup to their costumes. Thus, if their dresses were red, their faces were painted red. The Comics who dressed in black did not wear any makeup. In this way, the performers were allowed to march up Broad Street as they had for years before (Welch 155).

Long after the blackface makeup was banned in the parade, one can see remnants of the performance style and technique in the Mummers Parade. Like the obvious influence of cultural practices in other performance styles, one must acknowledge the role of blackface minstrelsy in the history of the parade and the practice of mumming in general. Even though blackface is no longer officially permitted in the parade, what I call *strategically invisible* blackface performance continues to this day. The Comic wench performer I mentioned earlier was not wearing midnight black makeup. His blackface consisted of what appeared to be black shoe polish thinly lining his face. The result was an almost grey-brown blackface cover. I claim that this is blackface performance in part because it completely differed from all of the other performers' makeup in that particular association, and the result was the same as blackface—a seeming parody of black skin. Other performers in other associations similarly perform strategically invisible blackface in

a variety of ways, such as the red makeup with red costumes. So, blackface performance continues in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade, despite the ruling that outlawed it. While it is futile to attempt to pinpoint one single origin of performance style for the Mummers Parade, understanding a particularly influential performance style and that style's impact on the parade can help flesh out the ways Mummers make meaning in their community via performances of race. The Mummers clearly focus on specific aspects of minstrelsy in order to deal with their history of race. In that way, minstrelsy performs an important thread in this genealogy of race and community in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade.

“Blackface makeup-burnt cork or charcoal-had been used by Mummers since the earliest days, ‘the lampblack period’” (Marion 1).

Much in the same way that African American Mummers remain largely invisible in histories of the Mummers Parade, the histories of minstrelsy dance around and away from a chronological or teleological story. Minstrelsy, like all performance forms, lacks a singular knowable origin but is located within and at the intersections of many performance traditions and cultural circumstances. Blackface performances have been noted within *commedia dell'arte*, English Mummings and Moorish dances, burlesque, and even in American circus performances (Bean 16). These various performances certainly carry forth networks of performance methods and cultural representations that play into the contemporary performance tradition known as blackface performance. By attempting to locate the ways in which histories of minstrelsy collide, intersect, conflict, and agree with not only other histories of minstrelsy but also Mummers Parade histories, a significant branch of a genealogy of race within the Philadelphia Mummers Parade community emerges.

Even within the written histories of minstrelsy, contradictions abound. Two different versions of this history rarely agree on much. Histories most often specifically differ in opinion

on the causes of the conception of minstrelsy, the effect the tradition had on the performance world, and the meaning of race within the performances. Rather than argue for a singular understanding of minstrelsy's past and present, in what follows I place various histories in conversation so as to emphasize the collisions and conflicts within the different versions.

Blackface characters, as I mention above, show up in much of early theatre. They appear in the earliest days of American theatre in the late 1600s, usually as servants for comic relief. By the 1800s, performers such as Charles Mathews, George Washington Dixon, and Edwin Forrest were known for their exclusively blackface performances. Similar performances also appeared in entr'actes in New York theaters and in "less respectable" venues like taverns and circuses (Lott 16). An important turning point came with Thomas Dartmouth Rice's song and dance number "Jump Jim Crow" in the early 1830s. This song quickly gained popularity and blackface soon found a home in the taverns of New York's less respectable precincts of Lower Broadway, the Bowery, and Chatham Street. These early performances focused largely on class issues, emphasizing black men's relationship to money or a general lack of social respectability that was considered natural in the upper-class tiers. The characters were often seen in happy-go-lucky ways in relationship to class and financial hardship (Lott 16-40).

W.T. Lhamon points to informal performances at Catherine Market in New York City during the 1820s as the impetus for later more formal minstrel performance (5). Lhamon begins by placing blackface into a historical context, citing its inception in the early 1800s in a prominent New York City market, Catherine Market. He argues that the market was not New York City's slave market, so it invited mingling of "disdained equals" (17), including blacks and ethnic minorities. The market was thus controlled by these working-class minorities. Because of this working class mingling in the market, according to Lhamon, the performances had more leniency to critique popular political issues of the day. Therefore, the working-class youth

performers used the market as a sort of liminal cultural space. Coupled with the changing political and economic tides in the early 1800s, the market provided a space in which to transgress social norms by performing and creating blackface. So, blackface emerged from this very frenetic cultural space, according to Lhamon.

Blackface did not remain in only these less respectable areas for long, however. It invaded the more respectable stages as part of the era's general stratification of theaters. These upper-class houses at first limited the number of such acts they would show, but beginning in 1841, blackface performers frequently took to the stage at even the classy Park Theatre in full three-act performances of their own, much to the dismay of some patrons. Typical blackface acts of the period were short burlesques, often with mock Shakespearean titles like "Hamlet the Dainty," "Bad Breath, the Crane of Chowder," "Julius Sneezzer," or "Dars-de-Money" (Bean 23).

By the 1840s, many blackface performers started calling themselves "Ethiopian delineators" and performed solo and in small teams. The performance often cited as the first complete minstrel performance occurred in 1843, when four blackface performers led by Dan Emmett came together to stage an exclusively minstrel performance at the New York Bowery Amphitheatre, calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels. While the show had little structure, it was still a raving success. The four sat in a semicircle, played songs, and traded wisecracks (Bean 16). One gave a stump speech in dialect, and they ended with a lively plantation song. Notably the *New York Herald* wrote that the production was "entirely exempt from the vulgarities and other objectionable features, which have hitherto characterized Negro extravaganzas" (qtd. in Lhamon 12). The minstrel show as a complete evening's entertainment was born.

Frank Dumont notes in his article, "The Origin of Minstrelsy," in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that this four-man performance marked the first minstrel performance, and that the

performance happened truly by accident. He claims, “These four men met accidentally and while performing on these instruments originated a form of entertainment that has delighted the two hemispheres ever since” (par. 1). Furthermore, Dumont is clear to emphasize the purely American aspects of this performance style, claiming that it has been influenced by no other countries. In a more specific cultural ownership claim, Dumont cites a personal correspondence from the aforementioned Dan Emmett, who Dumont reminds the reader is from Philadelphia. Emmett claimed to be the oldest living minstrel at the time of the 1896 letter. In the letter, Emmett tells of an overseas performance in London, in which some of the audience protested due to debts held by Pennsylvania at the time. In concluding his letter, Emmett clearly insinuates that, according to popular opinion, minstrelsy hails from Philadelphia. Additionally, Dumont lays to rest all claims of earlier performers, saying that all earlier blackface performance, including Daddy Rice, were precursors to minstrelsy but not in fact authentic minstrel performance. While Dumont claims that the minstrels travelled with great success to New York, he is clear again to point out that minstrelsy truly originated in Philadelphia. He says that the founder of the Virginia Serenaders, Tony Pastor, is quick to remind people that while New York brought them success, “he will always trace his minstrel career back to its true origin of Philadelphia” (par. 18). Thus Dumont’s account of the rise of minstrelsy attempts strategically to position the history in the communities of Philadelphia.

Many other scholars argue that the culmination of the formal minstrel show probably occurred in 1843 in New York City at the Chatham Theatre (e.g., Bean; Lhamon; Lott; Toll). The performance form quickly became the most popular form of live entertainment in America by the mid 1840s. Cited within literature and news articles of the nineteenth century quite commonly, minstrelsy took on a life of its own by the mid to late 1800s. For example, Mark Twain reportedly loved the form. He refers to it within *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The*

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and in his 1906 autobiography, he claims, "the genuine nigger show, the extravagant nigger show" was "the show which to me had no peer" and "a thoroughly delightful thing" (qtd. in Strausbaugh 108). According to Lott, for Twain, as for many other white Americans at the time, minstrel performance was an accurate depiction of racial identity (Lott 20).

In the 1840s and 1850s, William Henry Lane and Thomas Dilward performed on the minstrel stage as two of the first African American minstrels. Because slavery was still the law in the south, Black minstrels were limited to travel within the northern regions as well as the west. All-black troupes followed as early as 1855, some years before white minstrel troupes were the norm. While white minstrels supported their authenticity with claims about their instruments, African American companies played up the idea that their ethnicity made them the only true delineators of black song and dance (Toll 197–8).

Frank Dumont supports these claims in many ways in his 1896 article about the origins of minstrelsy. In describing the instruments minstrels use, he says, "The darkies of the south first introduced the banjo. It was made of gourd and was probably related to the tom-tom or wild instrument used by the Negro African state" (par. 16). Not to be cast down from the state of supreme authenticity for which Dumont clearly strives, he later notes that white minstrels thereby improved upon this instrument adding strings and tuning parts. He also explains that the songs and other styles of performance were "sentimental or wild" until Stephen Foster, a white minstrel, improved upon them (par. 19).

Keeping with convention, black minstrels still corked the faces of the men and as time went on, these minstrels relied on heavy promotion techniques, publicizing their performing abilities and quoting reviews that favorably compared them to popular white troupes. These black companies also often featured female minstrels and used plantation scenarios as their



common narrative structures. While Mel Watkins argues that individual black performers like Billy Kersands, James A. Bland, Sam Lucas, and Wallace King grew as famous as any featured white performer, one might question their true success when considering the fact that Bland had one of his most popular songs co-opted by the Mummies and died penniless and alone (114–7).

In the end, racism made black minstrelsy a difficult profession. When playing southern towns, performers had to stay in character even offstage, dressed in ragged clothes while perpetually smiling. Troupes left town quickly after each performance, and some had so much trouble securing lodging that they hired out whole trains or had cars custom built to sleep in, complete with hidden compartments in which to hide should things turn ugly. Even these were no haven, as whites sometimes used the cars for target practice. Their salaries, though higher than those of most blacks of the period, failed to reach levels earned by white performers; even superstars like Kersands earned slightly less than featured white minstrels. Unsurprisingly, most black troupes did not last long (Toll 223).

African Americans formed a large part of the black minstrels' audience, especially for smaller troupes. In fact, black audience numbers were so great that many theater owners had to relax rules relegating black patrons to certain areas. Theories as to why blacks would look favorably upon negative images of themselves vary. Perhaps they felt in on the joke, laughing at the over-the-top characters from a sense of in-group recognition. Maybe they even implicitly endorsed the racist antics due to internalized racism, or they felt some connection to elements of an African culture that had been suppressed but was visible—albeit in racist, exaggerated form—in minstrel personages. According to Toll, they certainly got many jokes that flew over whites' heads or registered as only quaint distractions to white audiences (Toll 227). Another draw for black audiences was the opportunity to see fellow African Americans on stage; black minstrels were largely viewed as celebrities within black communities (Toll 227). Many African

Americans, however, often either disregarded black minstrelsy or openly disdained it. For example, W.E.B. DuBois disdained minstrelsy, calling its performers “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens” (qtd. in Lott 15). Still, black minstrelsy was the first large-scale opportunity for African Americans to enter American show business (Lott 16).

Despite the presence of black performers, minstrelsy's racism (and misogyny) could be rather vicious. There were comic songs in which blacks were "roasted, fished for, smoked like tobacco, peeled like potatoes, planted in the soil, or dried up and hung as advertisements" (Lott 152), and there were multiple songs in which men accidentally wounded or killed women. In many ways, however, these performances were the only available means with which to discuss racism and slavery before, during, and immediately following the Civil War. Lott argues that, in particular, the black minstrels found an outlet in the North to speak about their experiences with slavery (168). Ultimately though, the performances, especially those of the northern white men, were racist and supported the continued role of plantations. Minstrelsy was banned in many southern cities, despite these attitudes. Minstrelsy was, after all, associated with the north. As tensions grew leading up to the Civil War, minstrels had to stop their southern tours (Lott 178).

With the outbreak of the American Civil War, minstrels remained mostly neutral and satirized both sides. As a form of satire, minstrelsy thrived in this heavily politicized time; however, as battles started progressing farther north, most minstrels sided with the Union. Their performances turned with the political tide and started to contain sad songs and skits. Groups focused their sketches on dying soldiers and their weeping widows and mothers. During this time, the performance genre followed the political climate, and in doing so remained as popular as ever (Lott 186).

Because new entertainments such as variety shows, musical comedies, and vaudeville appeared during the war, minstrels began to face their first major competition. Backed by talented promoters such as P. T. Barnum, these new spectacular and often comedic performances wooed audiences away. A lot of minstrel troupes responded to this competition by traveling farther away, venturing into the newly accessible markets of the South and Midwest in the late nineteenth century. Those minstrels who stayed in large northeastern cities followed Barnum's lead by employing new tactics such as advertising and spectacular performance techniques. Troupes grew in size. Haverly's Minstrels used over one hundred members at this time. Scenery grew fancy and costly, and groups brought in specialty acts such as Japanese acrobats or circus freaks, which made minstrelsy a less profitable venture for smaller troupes (Toll 142).

Other minstrel troupes tried to satisfy new and different tastes. One thing the minstrel troupes tried was to use female acts. For example, Madame Rentz's Female Minstrels first performed in 1870 in revealing costumes. At least eleven all-female troupes followed their lead by 1871. In reaction to the female groups, some of which did away with blackface, some male minstrelsy groups started to emphasize their authenticity and connection to early minstrelsy styles, while others jumped on board by including female impersonation acts. A wench character quickly became a vital aspect of post-war minstrel performance because of its parody of gender and the way the wench character emphasized the male performers' authenticity by poking fun at the female minstrels (Toll 157). In this way, one can see the ways that certain parts of this history were privileged in order to create a sense of cultural legitimacy in minstrel troupes. By emphasizing the male lineage of minstrel performance, the performers tried to make the female performers invisible.

In keeping with the women's changes to minstrelsy, some troupes drifted further from minstrelsy's roots. When George Primrose and Billy West broke with Haverly's Minstrels in the

late 1870s, they stopped performing in blackface and dressed themselves in lavish finery and powdered wigs. The men decorated the stage with elaborate backdrops and returned to the serious style once seen during the Civil War. Their brand of minstrelsy differed from other entertainments only in name (Toll 152-4). One could question, then, what exactly makes something minstrelsy. Is blackface a requirement of minstrelsy? Do acts that lack true blackface still count as minstrel performance? This question comes up time and time again in my analysis of Mummies' performance of race and is important to an analysis of how the Mummies strategically perform history in terms of race.

The changes after the Civil War continued with song choices. Paralleling the relatively new popularity of African American spiritual singers, some minstrel troupes added spirituals to their repertoire in the 1870s, though many of these were not authentic spirituals but actually parodies of those spirituals in the vein of other minstrel songs. These parodies of religious slave songs borrowed from traveling black singing groups or perhaps from songs black minstrels had picked up from word-of-mouth. With these new performance changes, minstrelsy became a sort of amalgamation of various forms. Spirituals, parody, political satire, female impersonations, and female burlesque performances complicated the issue of cultural legitimacy, authenticity, and competition seen throughout the history of minstrelsy, as there was certainly no one form of minstrelsy any longer (Toll 158). At this time, Mummies' performances were formally organizing, and they reflect this mishmash of performance styles.

By the 1890s, minstrelsy formed only a small part of American entertainment, and by 1919 a mere three troupes dominated the scene.<sup>5</sup> Small companies and amateurs, such as the Mummies, carried the traditional minstrel show into the 1900s. Black troupes took advantage of untapped markets in the west, recognizing the lack of friendly audiences remaining on the east

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<sup>5</sup> Dumont's Minstrels, as I discussed earlier, was one of these three groups.

coast. Most white actors moved into vaudeville, whereas many African Americans either refused to transition or were kept from transitioning to the new and more popular styles seen in vaudeville (Lott 58).

Lott claims that while many whites in the 1800s and early 1900s believed these minstrel performances to be highly accurate portrayals, in more recent years, especially since the Civil Rights era, most agree that the minstrel show "coon" is a racist caricature (Lott 20). This is not to claim an evolutionary history or to say that we are far more advanced in our knowledge of racist representation today than we were 150 years ago. Rather, it is important to note the very different epistememes in which this performance tradition was created and is now carried forth. During the 1800s, the available media contributed to an epistemology that not only made white minstrelsy quite popular but also contributed to the formation of African American minstrelsy. These epistemological differences reinforce the claim that early Philadelphia Mummers were neither racist nor gauche. They acted within their epistemological system. That is not to say that their form of racism was, therefore, acceptable. Instead, the epistemological shifts between ethnic, racial, and class ownership claims seen in the way Mummers situate their history of blackface performance are paramount in this discussion.

Indeed, the question of whether or not early minstrel performances were racist or co-optive abounds in relevant literature. In *Blacking Up*, Robert Toll insists that minstrel performances helped define rules of social acceptance for audiences at the time. Minstrelsy, in his opinion, expressed the audience's cultural and social viewpoints. Toll notes that an increase in population between 1820 and 1860 when rural residents moved to the large cities contributed to this important epistemological shift. In those years, New York City more than doubled its population, which caused citizens who used to live in rural locations but had since relocated to

an urban setting to make new adjustments in social opinions and values in relationship to the changing social conditions.

Toll claims that minstrelsy helped express this newly urban population's understandings of identity and culture:

These rural immigrants, cut off from their folk groups, had to establish new definitions of themselves as Americans and to find new 'rules' to govern and explain their situation. They desperately needed amusements that spoke to them in terms they could understand and enjoy, that affirmed their worth and gave them dignity. (5)

For Toll, minstrelsy provided this population with not only an amusement but also a new cultural value system.

Eric Lott in his book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* connects a nineteenth-century working-class mentality to minstrel performances. Lott places his theories on all working-class men, whether rural or urban, and maintains that minstrel performances mirrored and put forth the moral-value systems of its largely white male working-class audience. Additionally, he claims that representations of the black body in minstrel performances show that white minstrels sought to exert their power over blacks. When minstrels portrayed blacks as grotesque and inhuman, they were insuring that blacks would not gain the privileged status of whites. For Lott, because of this dynamic, we should remember minstrel performance for its ability to play with racist representation. In other words, Lott argues that blackface performance was productive in that it pointed to the problematic signs and codes within racial representation and brought those spaces of liberation into contemporary representational politics (7-8).

William Mahar, however, focuses on the musical component and concludes that minstrel songs were very important to musical theatre's history. In his text, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, he argues that the shows influenced the music of future generations, because the majority of each performance was essentially vocal or instrumental music. He touches on the differences in tastes between the elite and the working class, but refrains from assigning an association between the ideology of the audience and their financial status.

As previously mentioned, W.T. Lhamon cites the practice of dancing for eels at Catherine Market in New York City as the impetus for future minstrel performance. In these performances, blacks danced satirically in the market space, a space Lhamon claims was vitally liminal. This space was the midpoint between the various cultures of five-points and Manhattan; the rich and the poor; the haves and the have-nots. In that space, Lhamon argues, there was a sort of paradox that characterizes blackface performances everywhere and at every time. While not denying the racism or misogyny of blackface performance, Lhamon focuses on the importance of this juxtaposition in the performance.

Through these various theories on the affect and effect of blackface minstrelsy, one theory seems especially salient to the Philadelphia Mummers. In *The Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger argues that many minstrels of the 1800s were Italian, Irish, and Polish. Until the 1920s, the US Census and most Americans considered these groups of people nonwhite. In census reports until 1930, Italian, Irish, and Polish people (as well as Jewish and other immigrant populations) were separated out into their own ethnic groups. Roediger explains that in order to be considered white, these groups of people turned to comedy and parody in various performance styles such as blackface minstrelsy. In performing blackness, Irish or Italian men became white, in a sense. They performed something they were not—namely African Americans—which then helped them shed the ethnic label.

According to Roediger, when blacks started to perform in blackface the goal was in many ways the same. By making fun of their own population, black minstrels gained status and strove to become more accepted in white communities by being seen as white. While the result was not necessarily the same with black minstrels in the long term, many of the performers were able to shed the stigmas associated with their skin color in the short term. Roediger notes, “This extreme cultural pluralism [seen in minstrel performances] was at the same time a liquidation of ethnic and regional cultures into blackface and, ultimately, into a largely empty whiteness” (118). In other words, Roediger views the whiteness created within minstrelsy to be vacant rather than productive. Though he is careful to note that many minstrel jokes also explicitly targeted Irish, Italian, and Polish cultures, the performance form offered a common joke that all white people could laugh at, even those still becoming white, such as the Irish and Italians. It was within this liquidation, however, that even African Americans could at some time enter in and claim space in white culture through parody and comedy.

Following Roediger’s argument, one can see that during the beginnings of blackface and through the beginnings of the official Mummies Parade, black Mummies and white Mummies used the performance method of blackface to legitimize their community by emphasizing their similarity to the other white populations, or their difference from blacks, in the city. As Bhabha notes, “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (2). In other words, the way a culture produces difference or communicates about difference might contain the most significant aspects of that culture. Thus, the Mummies needed the black Other to point to their whiteness. In this way, the early days of African American performance in the Mummies and blackface performance helped legitimate the Mummies community. The community was not the Other to



the rest of the city; rather, the African Americans were the Other. It was not until decades later, when racial epistemologies changed, that the blackface performance became less popular, and the Mummers attempted to make it invisible in their history. This invisibility came at a cost, however.

January 1, 2008; 11:00am: I jog to catch up with the other members of my association. I don't really know where I am going, so I keep my eye on the tops of the frame suit costumes. I know I am not too far behind because I can still see their brightly colored feather tops. Comic wenchers surround me, and I feel like a sore thumb; a thirty-year-old female fancy in a sea of sixteen-year-old male comic wenchers. I run to catch up with my group. When I catch up, I sigh deeply with relief, but that sense of calm is brief; there is work to be done. "Cora! Help me guide this thing," Dunkin calls to me. He's carrying a large wheeled frame suit. The frame is made of two by fours constructed into a huge hexagonal frame that measures about eight feet in diameter. The frame is covered in luxurious fabric, and topped with a welded metal frame holding a spiraling foam caterpillar. Dunkin is clearly exhausted, though we haven't even gotten to the start of the parade route. As I help him push, I look down side streets and watch the comic wenchers pour onto the Oregon Street like the water of tributaries rushing into a main waterway. We stop at an intersection to let a group of wenchers merge. Though the official parade route is still blocks away, they have already started to dance and strut to the music of a jazz band. The horns wail and I can't help but join them in their dancing, grabbing Dunkin's arm; swirling and twirling round and round. I notice that the band is made up of African American horn players. The comic wenchers are all white, but the band is all African American.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

In returning to a discussion about African American participation in the parade, I must consider the issue of diversity, or a lack of diversity, in the parade in more contemporary times. The realities of the demographics remain. Or do they? Numbers can be deceiving, incorrect, or strategic. Had you asked me before that moment at the intersection of Oregon and something if there were any African American participants in the Mummers, I would have answered with a resounding "no." There clearly were African Americans present, though. Were these men Mummers? Did they identify themselves as Mummers? Did the Comic wenchers for whom they played consider them Mummers? The trickster of history dances throughout the parade on the issue of race and racism.

In his book on the Mummers, originally published just two years after the beginning of the blackface controversy, in 1966, Charles Welch addresses the issue of black participation in the Mummers. He claims, “negro participation in the parade is interesting” (148). Citing demographics for South Philadelphia at the time, he notes that the largest white group in the area was Italian with roughly 62,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The second biggest group, the Russian Jewish population, was much smaller at about 8500 people, followed by the Irish at 4500 and the Polish at 3500. African Americans made up most of the nonwhite population in the 1960s, which sat at about 67,000. Therefore, demographically, the area was almost equally nonwhite and white.

The 2000 US Census report does not stray drastically from the numbers in earlier years. There are roughly 140,000 people living in South Philadelphia, 85,000 of whom are white and 55,000 of whom are black (US Census Bureau). These numbers are proportional to Welch’s statistics and do not indicate a huge difference in demographical reasoning for the lack of African Americans in the parade.<sup>7</sup> The current census reports do not break white populations into smaller ethnic groups, so it is difficult to say whether or not Italian populations still dominate the area, but there are ongoing interpersonal jokes between various Mummers, even within the same group, that refer to their Italian, Irish, or Polish ethnic pride. This ethnic competition, whether friendly or fierce, dominates in the Mummers community, but is largely invisible to those outside of the Mummers community.

David Roediger notes that Irish and Italian populations used blackface performance as a way to become white or achieve the social status that white Americans held at the time. In the 1800s it was almost as common to hear racist insults about Irishmen as it was black men

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<sup>6</sup> Welch’s South Philadelphia runs from South Street in the north to the Delaware River in the south and the east, and the Schuylkill River in the west. Today, that region is still bounded by the same roads and rivers; however multiple interstate highways have been built, potentially changing the demographics of the area.

<sup>7</sup> The boundaries of South Philadelphia may be different because I had to use zip code boundaries in my research. Additionally, in the 1960s, census information did not include multiracial people, so these numbers may be highly misleading.

(Roediger 125). Therefore, at the peak of minstrel performance and at the beginnings of the organized Mummers parade, competition between Italians, Irish, Polish, and blacks was paramount in the city of Philadelphia. The Mummers community tends to ignore these histories, however, opting instead to emphasize their early and continuing cultural legitimacy in Philadelphia as well as the Mummers' continued acceptance of all races and ethnicities.

In the 1980s, the parade saw a sudden increase in African American participation. Palma Lucas noted when I interviewed her that this sudden increase in black participation in the parade was due to an intense outreach attempt in which Mummers groups along with city officials tried to recruit more people of color for the Mummers Parade. In 1983, a new association with African American board members was founded by a fifty-year African American Mummer veteran. A band marched with this association carrying the Octavius V. Cato banner in 1987; however, since then, African American participation has remained at a token level, ever reminding participants and audience members of the parade community's history with racism and problematic racial performances (Welch 177).

The modern day parade is a complex convergence of many different factors making it difficult to isolate just one issue when discussing race within the parade. Additionally, one cannot separate current issues of race and racism from the past, especially when the past is as checkered as that of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. In order to clearly understand how the Mummers communicate their history strategically to understand their community, this analysis tries to balance images from the past with modern day pictures—not an easy task.

In my interviews, race was a very sensitive topic. Most people did not want to discuss the issue at all. When I first brought up the idea that most people think the parade is racist, Dunkin claimed, "Right. A lot of people incorrectly think it's racist, but it's not." When pressed for further comment about why it's not racist, he simply stated, "If you talk to five different people

about this parade's history, you're going to get five different stories. That's just how it goes." Intentionally or not, Dunkin avoided the question of race in the parade.

Palma Lucas was hesitant to discuss race at all. She seemed quite uncomfortable when I asked her about race. Palma, an extremely diplomatic woman who runs the Mummies Museum, focused largely on the financial strain mumming creates in a community or for an individual. She pointed to numerous individual African American Mummies, but referred back to Welch's theory that African American people could no longer participate after the Great Depression due to the costs of creating costumes. She remembers the incorporation of the Goodtimers Association in the 1980s, as a way to diversify participation, but was not sure why their participation ended.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, she noted that she personally has tried to ask different African Americans to participate. She said, "Once I got a few guys . . . I mean, when John was working, you know, he knows and worked with a lot of them, and we got them to come over. They were all excited, but as soon as they got here, and saw it wasn't just about drinking, they weren't interested. I mean, they didn't want to do the work." Palma focuses on the disinterest on the part of potential African American participants over the possibility that the Mummies might not be entirely accepting or friendly to black Philadelphians. Thus, the narrative around race in the parade continues to support the fact that the Mummies focus on specific histories while ignoring others. In doing so, the Mummies attempt unconsciously to maintain their sense of legitimacy while making all arguments against the parade invisible.

In the 2009 parade, three African American women marched with the Golden Sunrise New Year's Association. In speaking with them as we waited for the parade to begin and after as we waited for the results, I tried to get a sense of their opinions about race in the parade

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<sup>8</sup> The Goodtimers Association has returned as a Comic group, but is made up of mostly white members. I attempted to locate the history of this group, but to no avail.

community. One woman, the one who had convinced the other two to perform, explained that she had done a lot of research about the different groups. She said that she had contacted numerous groups and even attended barbeques and parties held by a few of the groups. After this research, she realized that the Golden Sunrise group was one of the most open-minded and friendly groups. She ended her remarks by saying, “I found that the Italians are the most open. The Irish and Polish are really racist.” Similarly, one of her friends told me that she wanted to take back the performance tradition, which “very clearly comes from Egypt.” Their comments show continued attempts—perhaps unconscious attempts—from outside of the white Mumpers community to reclaim certain aspects of the history that have been made invisible via the rest of the Mumpers.

A simple Google search of “black Mumpers” brings up countless blogs and opinion pieces on the issue. One blog devoted completely to the question of whether or not the Mumpers are racist claims, “I could be wrong (it happened once before) but I highly suspect that if you asked most black people in the city about the Mummer's Parade, they would answer with either indifference or bewildered amusement, not with an angry diatribe about stuff that happened in 1963” (Johnny Good Times). Responses to the blog that actually deal with the racism issue claim that racism exists everywhere, including in the Mumpers. These statements indicate an attention to the idea that the Mumpers are no different and should be accepted by Philadelphians.

In another similarly based opinion piece in a blog identified as “The musings of a Philadelphia Physician who has served the community for nearly six decades,” the author focuses largely on the problems with viewership. Towards the end of the blog, he states, “Whether newer ethnic groups were excluded from participation by the hard-core South Philadelphia Italian, Polish and Irish groups is not immediately obvious. It could well be the reverse, a rejection by the newer arrivals or their leaders” (Philadelphia Reflections). The author

seems disinterested, and somewhat racist himself, using an outdated word, “Orientals” and claiming that blacks are “newer ethnic groups.” The site, however, again points to the attempt to distance the Mummers from issues of racism.

A site devoted to a story about childhood memories of the comics claims that the author’s early memories of the mummers involve whiskey and blackened faces. Toward the end of the piece the author says that s/he always was careful not to get blackened by the burnt corked faces during their close interactions with the crowds. The piece ends with, “Today’s commercial equivalent is the obnoxious silly string in a can that is sold by vendors to the parade audience. Broad Street is left littered by the resultant Multicolored Mess” (Wry Bread). This piece, therefore, claims that the blackface performance needs a modern day equivalent. It cannot just go away. It must be replaced. Regardless, the history of racism and white supremacy is subordinated in favor of the more acceptable contemporary performances of community such as inclusion and diversity.

January 1, 2008, 9:00am: I wait patiently to get my makeup done, trying to dodge questions from the 5 year old veteran Mummer who has taken an instant liking to me. When I finally sit down, the girl charged with doing my makeup asks me what my costume is called. I say, “African Queen,” trying to hide my cringe. Palma immediately pipes up and says, “She can’t wear blackface though, so do it white.” The girl covers my face in white makeup and then marks my cheeks and chin with red and black zigzag lines. I am simultaneously not wearing blackface and wearing blackface.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

The issue then goes back to how the Mummers interact with the history of minstrelsy and black participation, and how these histories play out in the contemporary parade community. In the earliest days of the Mummers the emphasis remained upon shooting, drinking, and travelling from house to house. Costumes started out as more carnivalesque costumes and moved into formal groups of blackface wench performances towards the end of the 1800s. Even then, the less organized version of the Mummers did not rely upon blackface as much as other, more

familial and culturally specific forms of performance. Pictures and drawings of the celebrations from the 1870s to the 1890s show Mummies in raggedy dresses and clown makeup, but the Mummies do not appear to be performing in blackface (Hansberry 1-20). Once the parade started to be officially sponsored, even with parade money offered up by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1896, formal blackface began to appear. By 1901, the first year that the city sponsored the parade, blackface appears in every picture (Hansberry 1-20).

In these early years of the parade, blacks, Italians, Irish and Polish groups competed for very real space in the city via this competition of cultural legitimacy. The participating groups were made up of minorities who strove for acceptance and status in a competitive and ethnically divided Philadelphia. For example, by co-opting Bland's song, Dumont attempted to claim cultural legitimacy in the Mummies Parade and therefore in Philadelphia. In the early years of the parade, this competition was one between different minority groups. The epistemologies within which they performed supported their tactics and strategies within a larger framework of competition and legitimacy claims remaining from colonial times. Times changed though. By the 1930s, the fear of immigration had subsided and African American Mummies ceased to participate (Marion 2). When the last black Mummer group stopped participating, a shift happened in the parade, and it became a bunch of white men using old performance methods to support claims of cultural legitimacy already established.

By the 1960s, common thought on race relations had drastically changed and this friendly competition read as a racist insult. When city officials responded to the problems within the parade (namely that of blackface performance) the Mummies lacked a solution. In many ways, the Mummies felt that their tradition, one they had fought for decades to gain and to make legitimate, had been ripped away from them. From within the performance, the Mummies failed to see that their once friendly comedy was now racist and offensive. In an attempt to comply

with the new regulations, the Mummers turned to strategically invisible blackface. The blackface itself was not so much gone as made invisible.

From the beginning of the ban on blackface performance, Mummers have used other colors in makeup, producing a similar effect. While the parade banned the completely jet black makeup, colors representative of other races, such as red and yellow were not banned. Because many of the costumes revolve around the theme of specific ethnicity, perhaps because of the early minstrel influence, the result is often an extremely racist performance of “Indian” or “Oriental.” For example, when I performed in front of the judges, the trio in front of me was called “Tom-tom.” As I waited to perform, I watched as the three men practiced their dance routine. The men relied heavily upon stereotypical “Indian” dance moves. They ended up winning second place in their category.

December 23, 2008; 7:30pm: My friend asks me what I am planning to do on New Year’s Eve. I explain that I will probably just sleep because of the Mummers the next day. “Oh, no thank you!” he exclaims. I explain that it’s my dissertation topic and ask him for further information about his reaction. He tells me about an encounter he had with some Mummers using racial slurs towards him. “Plus, they all wear blackface,” he ends.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

This performance genealogy ends at the intersection of racial parody, performance legitimacy and change. As I have outlined here, the performance of race in the Philadelphia Mummers parade relies heavily on strategic invisibility. The various epistemologies surrounding race and the parade have changed, but the parade itself struggles to move beyond the history within which it formed. To deal with this struggle, the Mummers privilege certain histories, such as those of Charles Dumont and the adoption of “Oh Dem Golden Slippers,” while subordinating other histories, such as the problems of blackface connected to Frank Dumont, the appropriation of Bland’s song, and the end of widespread African American participation. Although I have not encountered any racism from any individual Mummers, as a community the Mummers struggle



with the racism of their past. In this way, the Mummies' relationship to their history, and the way they write their history in terms of race is the key factor. Race in the parade is a performance following Schechner's definition of the term: A restored behavior. In other words, the performance of minstrelsy has been restored in a contemporary fashion via the Mummies Parade. This restoration, however, involves a new set of factors. There is a new audience, a new performer, and a new set of implications. The practice is restored with a difference and the Mummies try to control that difference. Thus, in attempting to tell the history of this restored behavior, the Mummies try to distance themselves from the history of racism while maintaining their connection to the history to ensure their legitimacy in the city of Philadelphia. This task has proven to be difficult for the Mummies community, to say the least.

Nobody seems to question the fact that the Mummies come from a problematic racial performance. As one blogger stated in response to the argument that a parade that began in blackface can only ever get so far from its roots:

Just like pretty much everything else with a history of more than 50 years in America, the Mummies Parade has a checkered (at best) past when it comes to racism. But judging it only on its past is extremely unfair. It's the equivalent of saying Major League Baseball is currently racist because they didn't let blacks play until 1947. (Johnny Good Times)

Minstrelsy is a racist performance style at best. The Mummies undoubtedly used this style of performance from the parade's first sponsored years; years that overlapped extensively with the history of minstrelsy. These histories are where the problem begins. Like a genetic disease, racism within the Mummies Parade has become active through the generations. Although the early Mummies used a performance method that at the time did not have as problematic racist implications, with the birth of new generations, the problematic racism therein has come to the

fore. The Mumpers, however, strategically emphasize other histories of race in the parade over this problematic history of minstrelsy.

Statements about the potential racism behind the Philadelphia Mumpers Parade attempt to distance the parade from negative ideas about racism, placing the parade and its history in a realm of suspended animation. Just as blackface performance came to be within an epistemology that allowed the Irish and Italian performers to become white and gain acceptance in the United States, the contemporary epistemology of the Mumpers hinges on the need for the parade community to retain control over the legitimacy of their performance tradition in Mumpery. In trying to distance the parade from the racism in its past, communications about race, Mumpers history, and current communities attempt to make issues of racism invisible. The actual result, however, is an air of dismissal. In this distancing, the Mumpers appear apathetic and therefore racist. Therefore, the more important issue surrounds how the race in the parade and the racist past of the parade affect the community's understandings of race and race's influence on/in the parade.

July 23, 2008, 8:57am: I stare at the cover of *Life, Liberty and the Mumpers*. A man with a purple and green striped painted face in a matching wench costume stares back at me from the cover. His makeup is smeared, potentially after a long day of strutting up Broad Street. The longer I stare at the picture the more the makeup seems to become invisible and disappear. When I look up, though, a purple and green spot follows my gaze wherever I look. The invisibility of blackface will not disappear.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

## **CHAPTER THREE REAL GIRL DANCES IN MUMMERS THROG**

### **Gender in the Philadelphia Mummies Parade**

January 6, 2007; 11:30am: “Let’s go girls!” Shania Twain’s music blasts from the stereo speakers in the back of a truck as three Fancy division Mummies walk past us. I snap a few photos of the trio and wait for the next group to strut up Broad Street. While I wait, I scan through the pictures I just took with my mom’s digital camera. “Wait a second,” I say to my mom as I suddenly put two and two together. “They’re women!” My mom looks at the group of Mummies now stopped in front of us. “Really? Do you think?” she replies, stretching out her neck to examine the group for clear signs of gender. Explaining the connection I made between the music and the costumes, we soon come to an agreement that these Mummies must be women.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

The Philadelphia Mummies Parade challenges binary ideas about the performance of gender by using cross-dressing parade performances in combination with historically all-male participation rules. According to official statements by the Mummies, the parade performances were exclusively male, upholding a “no women in the line of march” rule, until the 1970s when the men started to allow women to join the parade. The first prize knowingly awarded to a woman came in the late 1970s but greater female inclusion did not become more common until the mid to late 1980s (mummies.com). Despite these changes and this increased female participation, Mummies associations have been allowed to run their own groups, and many still choose, at least tacitly, to ban women from participating altogether. Some associations allow women to participate behind the scenes, but do not mix participation in the actual performance; still other groups are completely coed (Hansberry 129-30; Masters 87-90; Welch 167-8).

These demographics, however, tell only a small bit of the story of gender performance in the parade. The Mummies’ performances have always been in part explicitly transgender. The costume category of female impersonator historically made up a large portion of at least two of the divisions: Comic and Fancy. In early literature from parade associations, descriptions of

these performers reference cross-dressing Mummies using female pronouns when in the context of the parade performance. Additionally, in the earliest days of the official parade through and beyond the golden anniversary, a sort of passing transgender performance was honorable; female impersonators that passed as biological females won the top prizes in the parades. It was not until the official inclusion of biological females that costumes focused less on a passing form of female impersonation and more on costume construction and performance. Yet, this transgender aspect of the parade remains an important influence even today (Masters 45-6; Welch 88).

Throughout the histories of the parade, the performances of gender and community have emphasized the practices and limitations of both carnivalesque and a form of passing female impersonation. In defining carnivalesque, I rely upon Bakhtin's notions of the term. Bakhtin elucidates carnivalesque in his book *Rabelais and his World* in which he compares Rabelais' novelic treatments to the medieval carnival. Bakhtin outlines the carnivalesque features as follows: an inversion of power structures and hierarchies; an importance of bodily excesses; parodic treatment of scapegoated individuals; uses of vulgarities; and a festive atmosphere of laughter and spectacle. In his view, then, medieval carnival allowed people to escape from the reality of everyday inhibitions and oppressions for a specific period of time each year (5-6). The Mummies Parade began as this kind of highly carnivalesque neighborhood activity during which the poor working-class citizens of South Philadelphia shed their class, gender, and race identity markers in favor of wild performances that inverted and subverted these identity expectations. These performances allowed the Mummies to embrace cross-dressing in part as a way of expressing inverted power dynamics. The earlier parades focused more on caricatures, emphasizing the obvious exaggeration of the characterization. In this context, the male Mummies could use cross-dressing as a metaphoric steam valve, connecting it both implicitly and explicitly to parodic performances of race and class. In a genealogical web very different

from that of race or class, however, the Mumpers community has attempted to shift from this carnivalesque gender performance in the early days of the parade to a passing form of female impersonation in the later days of the parade in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This shift affected the Mumpers' performances of community by placing a greater emphasis on propriety in the community.

A theoretical understanding of the Mumpers' use of a passing form of cross-dressing and resulting emphasis on propriety can be teased out in terms of Judith Butler's arguments in *Gender Trouble*. The basis of Butler's argument is that the seeming coherence of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality is in fact culturally constructed through the "stylized repetition of acts" (179). In other words, these acts—for example, a masculine gender display in a male body—establish the appearance of an essential, ontological gender via repetition. Therefore, Butler suggests that gender, sex, and sexuality are performative, meaning that the discourse of gender, sex, and sexuality produces an action its utterance. The result is a kind of regulatory discourse of gender, sex, and sexuality. Butler disputes arguments for binary biological sex, instead arguing that the sexed body is also culturally constructed. For Butler, the assumed naturalness of biological sex just shows how entrenched within discourse the concept is. Because one tends to think of the sexed body as natural, it serves as the alibi for the constructedness of gender.

Butler relates her theories about gender, sex, and sexuality to issues of drag and cross-dressing by arguing that drag or cross-dressing performances do not challenge the actual original, because there is no original gender or sex. Instead, drag performances challenge "the very notion of an original" (175). In this way, Butler claims that drag performances are humorous not because of some understanding of parody of an original but because "laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived" (176). In analyzing how certain repetitions are

disruptive whereas others are hegemonic, Butler returns to her argument of the performativity of gender. She claims:

If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which the body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (180).

In other words, gender performances—especially cross-dressing or drag performances—consistently reveal gender identity as a discursive construct not a natural reality. This discursive construct is key in the Mummers Parade, especially in the way gender performance functions as a way the community makes sense of itself.

In the end of the 1800s and as the parade became officially sanctioned, the Mummers' cross-dressing performances shifted to a form contingent upon passing. The female impersonators attempted to trick the gazes of the police and the parade spectators rather than performing an obvious parody of cross-dressing popular in the earlier days of the parade celebrations. The transition from the earlier carnivalesque gender performances to the passing form of cross-dressing reveals a way the Mummers shifted the discourse around both gender performance and their understandings of their community. In other words, the discourse surrounding the shift to a passing form of female impersonation performed the action of shoring up the community boundaries via propriety. This shift, therefore, functions as a significant way the Mummers make sense of their community.

The performances of female impersonation transformed drastically when the city officially started to sponsor the parade. As local businesses and the city took control of many of the business aspects of the parade, such as planning of the route, the Mummers began to focus on

more tacit control over both the performances and the community that created them via an emphasis on propriety. With time this emphasis on propriety caused the passing form of female impersonation to overshadow the earlier carnivalesque gender displays. In this metamorphosis, the performances of gender took on new meanings, thereby affecting and reforming the performances of community.

I define propriety in this context using Certeau's theories in *The Practices of Everyday Life*. Certeau defines propriety by identifying four basic aspects of individual performance in relationship to a neighborhood or culture. The first of these four aspects involves repressing minor acts so as to be accepted more fully into the culture. As Certeau says, "Propriety first imposes itself in this analysis through its negative role: it is related to law, that which renders the social field heterogeneous by forbidding the distribution of any kind of behavior in any order at any time" (17). Similarly, the other three aspects, "the social transparency of the neighborhood," "the consumption and appearance of the body," and "the social task of signs" all have to do with the unspoken decision of "how far is not going too far?" (18-21). In other words, a member of a community has to judge just how far he or she can go while remaining accepted by the community. These characteristics of propriety mark the boundaries of the Mumpers community by separating the participants who can and do follow the tacit rules from those who cannot and do not. In the Mumpers, propriety of gender performance has shifted through history. As previously mentioned, in the earliest years, propriety meant a more carnivalesque performance of gender. When the gender performances shifted to emphasize a passing female impersonation, the rules of propriety reflected this shift by tacitly emphasizing a more stringent rule that female impersonators should pass as women and must follow all of the social rules that biological women did. Those people who could or did follow these unspoken rules at different points in time have been identified as members of the community. Conversely, however, those people who

either did not understand these tacit rules of propriety or chose not to follow them showed their lack of membership in said community and further defined the Mummers community in this way. The Mummers' understandings of who they were as a community thereby shifted with these changing uses of propriety.

Despite the fact that the parade has not always been so focused on a passable female impersonation and strong support of propriety, the attention to a male line seems second nature to most people within the community. The parade has been and should continue to be passed down paternally, according to many of even the most modern members of the Mummers community. Through the parade history, paternal lines, familial or friendly, have created and supported the parade community. From the earliest days of the unofficial parade celebration, fathers have passed down the art of strutting and female impersonation to their sons who have been permitted to march as soon as they could walk. Even today, father to son education defines the Mummers community within paternal boundaries. Even the Mummer women, for whom the promotion of the male line has the most negative affects in terms of participation, either defend the rules about gender or deny the existence of sex separation in the parade activities.

Despite the fact that the Mummers community has largely supported the rules and practices barring female participation by increasingly emphasizing the tacit rules of propriety within the community, external subversion has entered into the histories of the parade. Perhaps one of the most famous usurpers remains Laura Lee, a news reporter who snuck into the parade in 1929, stealing much of the attention of that year's festivities. To this day, many Mummers claim that the story of Laura Lee is pure legend, but photographic evidence supports the story. Regardless, her actions or the story of her actions helped define the performances of both gender and community in the parade (Hansberry 89; Williams 23). If Laura Lee could and did sneak into the parade, who is to say other women did not? Clearly, the attempt at a male-only performance



was at least partially unsuccessful through the history of the parade. This failure has caused a troubling of gender as a whole in the parade, in keeping with Butler's aforementioned theories in *Gender Trouble*. Because of the negotiation between the productive (passing female impersonation creates the chance for subversion) and the prescriptive (the community should uphold propriety so subversion doesn't occur) nature of gender within the Mummies, gender takes on an important role in the current and historical performances of the Mummies Parade.

Starting with Laura Lee, I explicate the troubling of gender as related to the passing form of female impersonation found in the parade. Centering my study on the balance between women's subversive roles such as those of Laura Lee, women's accepted roles such as those of women's auxiliary groups, and men's carnivalesque and passing female impersonation in the parade, I tie this study back to contemporary ideas about gender and the Mummies. In sum, I argue that despite the specific attention paid to the male-only exclusivity of the Mummies Parade, because of the emphasis on the passing form of female impersonation, women could and did sneak into the parade. The subversive presence of women in the parade or the mere chance that they could sneak in created a dynamic in which the participants had to vigilantly uphold the community propriety. Thus, the Mummies have continued to maintain a focus on the tacit use of propriety as a way to define their community.

January 6, 2007; 8:30pm: My mom and I click on one of the photos of the trio we had seen earlier in the day. It's still hard to tell if these three Mummies are men or women. We start to question every Mummer we saw that day. Was that Christmas-themed Fancy really a man as I had thought? "I never thought I wouldn't be able to tell if someone was a boy or a girl," my mom exclaims furrowing her brow at the computer. "I thought women weren't allowed to march," she continues. We scour the pictures we took of different fancies earlier in the day. Finding the picture with the blackface paint was unsurprising. The Mummies' reputation precedes them on the subject of race. Their reputation as related to women's participation seems to contradict what we saw earlier in the day. As a result, we look through the images of the parade- this year postponed to January 6<sup>th</sup>—trying to understand the tacit and written rules about participation.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

Although women have always been a part of the Mummers, they have only recently been allowed to march side by side with the men. As I mention above, however, some groups still tacitly avoid allowing female participation. The rules about participation have not stopped women from trying to march over the years. As a result of the historical “no women in the line of march” rule, many women from outside of the community attempted to sneak into the parade at various points in history (Welch 138). The most famous of these is a news reporter in the 1920s: Laura Lee. In fleshing out a genealogy of gender and community in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade, the way the Mummers perform the history of Lee’s participation in relationship to other events during that time is paramount because it points to the troubling of gender in their community history and their response via propriety.

I scroll through the microfilm. January 2, 1929: nothing about the Mummers. I check my notes only to realize that it was postponed that year due to weather. I turn the knob and the film zooms past the lens. Slowing the speed, I watch as the pages of the January 6, 1929, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* scroll by. Inch by inch, her picture appears in the frame. In it, she wears a white fur coat, the weight of which seems to pull her slight figure down. Her face broadcasts a smirk. On her head, a fur cap tops off the Alaskan Indian costume. Her eyes gaze knowingly at the camera; at me. The weight of her body stands on one leg completing the cocky, triumphant air about her. She is so real in this picture. I can almost hear her voice and touch the rough threads of her fur coat.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

Laura Lee snuck into the parade in 1929. That year was a particularly important year for the male tradition of the Mummers. The parade director, Bart McHugh, planned to step down after that year’s parade. He had been a Mummer since before the city officially sanctioned the parade. McHugh held great import in the parade, organizing the clubs and moderating the debates about city acceptance of the parade for years before 1901. McHugh was instrumental in the city’s acceptance of the parade, and every Mummer knew it (Hansberry 127-30). Therefore, when rumors started to spread that he might step down the Mummers were stunned and

concerned. What would the new leadership do? How might this change in power affect the parade?

In a completely separate set of events that would soon collide with those mentioned above, Laura Lee vied for a job as a reporter at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*. The newspaper employed only male reporters for the hard-hitting articles. The newspaper consisted of a lot of Reuters and Associated Press-written articles by men about national and world news events as well as male-authored articles about local affairs. That paper, along with all other newspapers of the time, restricted the women's writing to issues dealing with the home and family relationships or communication (Hansberry 130). Some typical articles on the women's page carry the titles: "Are Women Destroying Chivalry?" (Johnson) or "The Job of Moving a Husband" (Marshall). Limited to one page of the paper, the opportunity for single or widowed women to make a living as news reporters was very limited.

Legend has it that Laura Lee wanted more. As an unmarried woman in her thirties, Laura Lee knew she could handle the rigors of reporting the big events. She went to the editor of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* and demanded a chance to prove herself along with the men. They struck a deal that if she could make it through the Mummers Parade undetected, they would hire her. She had her challenge, and off she went to prove herself (Hansberry 130; Williams 23).

While Laura Lee fought to win favor with the editors at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, the Mummers fought to take first prize in that year's parade. Team captains began bribing big winners from other associations to come over to their teams. The Mummers looked to McHugh for guidance but he stated that he could do nothing to control the group with which a man chose to march. McHugh struggled to keep the parade from breaking down from "good natured rivalry to...all out brawls" (Hansberry 127). This was a harder task than it seemed that year.

As a way to distract the Mummers from their infighting and to show his power, McHugh called a last-minute meeting of the captains during which he set down hard and fast rules of conduct for that year's parade. The rules paralleled the rules of propriety in everyday society during that era: female impersonators were not to show their shoulders or their arms. Any "lady" who wore a shawl or wrap but removed it in front of the judges, thereby revealing her shoulders, would be disqualified. The female impersonators were to show good taste in their performances (Hansberry 128). Ironically, this was the setting in which Laura Lee made her one and only appearance in the parade, making history as the first woman known to enter the parade.

The parade was delayed in 1929 due to poor weather. This delay added to the suspense and drama surrounding McHugh's impending resignation. For the third time in five years, the rain held the parade at bay, causing McHugh to postpone the festivities until Saturday, January 5, 1929. As is tradition, a few dozen Comics marched through the rain anyway, but the Fancies and string bands held off in order to protect their expensive costumes. By the time the Mummers got to march on Saturday, they were raring to go. McHugh had always been clear to make sure that the female impersonators were truly impersonators and not real women (Hansberry 127-9; Masters 43-4). Perhaps because of the delay, perhaps because it was his last year, perhaps he just never noticed, Laura Lee slipped by McHugh's gaze in 1929.

"Real Girl Dances in Mummer Throng: 'Miss South Pole' Describes Thrills, Surprises and Mishaps of Her Unique Adventure; FINDS MEN CAN BE CATTY" (Lee).

On Monday, January 7, 1929, the Mummers awoke to an article in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* entitled "Real Girl Dances in Mummer Throng" (Lee). Although it is impossible to know how the Mummers reacted to the article at the time, plenty of authors since have written disparaging stories about the reporter who authored the piece: Laura Lee. Lee's

article remains the primary example of a recorded instance in which a real woman escaped the gaze of parade controllers and challenged the Mummers' all-male tradition.

Laura Lee's article recounts the two day experience of entering the Mummer's Parade out of "burning curiosity" (par. 1). In an almost playful way, Lee explains that it's not an easy task to "be a lady pretending to be a man pretending to be a lady dancing with Mummers who think you're a man pretending to be a lady" (par. 4). She reveals in the article that she was the Eskimo, "Miss South Pole" (par. 11), that spectators might have seen marching up Broad Street with the rest of the Mummers. First, however, there was a delay. Lee recounts how she hid in a phone booth near 13<sup>th</sup> and Porter Streets and just so happened to overhear McHugh and the rest of the captains and officials arguing about what to do about the weather on New Year's Day.

Because the parade was postponed, Lee explains that she had to start all over and return the following Saturday, but this time she "was fortified with a big member badge [she] had copped from the George B. McClernand Club" (par. 11). At this point in the article she starts to describe the culture alongside the various events of the day. For example, Lee used the waiting time before the parade started to find out what Mummers talk about. She recounts funny stories and friendly assistance from the men—something she seemed relatively surprised to find. She also explains that "men are catty" (par. 16). The men she walked with insulted each other's dresses and joked around with each other. The camaraderie prevailed, however, and she was even offered a big cigar as one subtitle of the article emphasizes.

Part way through the parade, after she hurt her ankle, Lee claims she realized how much work mumming requires. She explains, though, that her aches and pains quickly left her mind, because the crowd and the club members were so energetic and fun. After recounting the group's renewed enthusiasm at the judges' stand and the numerous prizes her group won, Lee explains that it was her first and last year as a Mummer. Ending the article, she claims, "There's a saying

among the mummers, ‘Once a mummer, always a mummer,’ you can’t get it out; it stays in the family for generations. It may be all true, but there’s my injured foot that makes locomotion virtually impossible and my mummer days are over” (par. 38). In other words, in true ethnographic form, she learned what she needed to learn and got out. The men dressed as women in the parade’s history were not always so objective, however.

“A gang of young fellows fantastically dress as ladies and carrying trumpets, tin pans and other noisy instruments” (“Shot at Serenade”).

Although women were not allowed to march in the parade until the 1970s, females have been ever-present within the parade. Until female participation became commonplace, female impersonation held the norm. Female impersonators participated in the Mummers traditions from the earliest days, even the days before the city sanctioned the parade. In fact, during the first fifty years of the parade, female impersonators were almost equal in power and influence as the club captains. A good female impersonation won top prizes, which therefore earned points and top awards for the association with which the impersonator won. In the end, the First Place Club award was and continues to be the goal for most Mummers (Hansberry 87-8; Masters 45-6; Welch 88; Kennedy 1-13).

From where the female impersonators came is an entirely more complex question. Hansberry’s text on the earliest years of the parade notes that before the parades were officially accepted or even organized “men dressed in everything from garments out of the rag bag to elaborate hand sewn capes” (7). She theorizes that different performance and cultural traditions mixed together in the city’s poorer southern neighborhoods to create the amalgamation that is the Mummers. With this kind of grassroots creation of the Mummers, perhaps the female impersonation came more from necessity than anything else.

Welch, however, claims that the art of female impersonation first entered the parade after the city officially accepted it. In the 1900s, a well-known female impersonator held elaborate New Year's Eve balls that often temporally overlapped with the Mummers Parade. When the two celebrations met, the mingling created what became a staple of the parade: Female Impersonation (Welch 88). This theory, however, contradicts some of the other evidence available in newspapers from years of the first parades and before.

Articles from the earliest years of the organized parade speak of female impersonators. An 1893 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article reviews the parade, outlining the numerous parade routes and staging areas. Additionally, the article illustrates some of the common costumes, one of which is called "The Skirt Dancer" and clearly shows a female impersonator ("All the Mummers"). Another article published the following year actually names some performers "female impersonators." This article explains, "The female impersonators of the club were stylish and by their sides walked fine English swells" ("Merry Mummers in Gaudy Garb"). Therefore, one can safely say that female impersonation has been used in the Mummers Parade from the earliest days.

Female impersonation has, after all, been a part of minstrelsy and burlesque performance from the very beginning of those performance genres. Eric Lott suggests that the cross-dressing practices found in minstrelsy have more to do with a homosocial/ homosexual obsession on the part of white men towards black men, than it had to do with gender (23). Whereas Annemarie Bean claims that the female impersonator enabled minstrelsy to create and contain the feminine sexuality needed in their performances. Bean even points out that the word "impersonator" is a nineteenth-century word brought into use alongside the rise of minstrelsy (246). Indeed, female impersonators were not necessary in minstrel performances because women had been performing on the stage for almost two centuries by that time. In the Mummers, in which women could not

perform, however, the female impersonator took on a different role than that found in strict minstrel performances.

January 1, 2008; 9:45am: I stand around waiting for the lull in traffic to ease. I am on my way to my first ever strut with the Mummers Parade. After a brief delay because of weather, we are finally on our way. Walking over from the clubhouses on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, different groups mingle. I happen to be walking next to a bunch of Comic wenches so we all start talking. “First time?” a boy in his late teens asks me. “Yeah,” I reply, “You?” He goes on to explain that he’s been marching for years. Although he seems more interested in finding beer than talking to me, I keep the conversation going as long as possible. He tells me that last year he marched with a different group but he just couldn’t do it this year. When I ask why, he points down the street to a group of wenches in bright pink and black costumes and says, “Look at what they are wearing! I couldn’t do that!” I look at the other group and turn back to him. He is dressed in a green and orange version of the exact same costume. “The pink?” I ask.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

Early Mummers celebrations emphasized the more carnivalesque, ironic performances of gender. The female impersonation category of costume stemmed from both budgetary constraints and other logistical issues. Because the Mummers started in the working-class neighborhoods of South Philadelphia where extra money was not plentiful, the more comedic types of Mummers used their wives’, mothers’, and daughters’ clothes for many of their costumes. Additionally, the costumes that caricatured women allowed Mummers to escape police pursuit more easily— a necessity in the years during which the parade was outlawed.<sup>1</sup>

Across the board, these early parades highlighted the carnivalesque. For example, an 1873 article describes these early Shooters as consisting of variously-costumed men in three or four forms. One group consisted of clowns, whereas another group “had the most grotesque display with dresses” (“Philadelphia and Suburbs. New Year’s”). In the early years and in the articles that describe the menace that was the pre-sponsored parade, the Mummers’ female impersonation was one based largely on caricature. Some Mummers wore women’s clothing but

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss the outlawing of the parade practices more extensively in Chapter Four.



did little to achieve a passable female impersonation. In distinct contrast to the Indian costume that “sparked fear in the minds of women and children who saw little of the mirth” (“Philadelphia and Suburbs”), the Mummers who dressed in women’s clothing tended to prompt laughter from the spectators in those days. By taking on a woman’s gender display and inciting laughter in both performers and audience members, these early Mummers clearly took on a more carnivalesque gender performance.

According to Bakhtin, the fool and the clown were often celebrated during carnival and laughter was considered a communal necessity and a vital part of carnival. As Bakhtin reiterates, “The people’s ambivalent laughter... expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it” (Bakhtin 12). In Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, all were welcome and encouraged to participate in this laughter during the carnival. For the Mummers, however, this point in history is important in that it exemplifies a shift in the Mummers’ performance of community via their gender performances. When the Mummers used carnivalesque gender performances in their local community celebrations in the early to mid-1800s, the parody of the performances functioned to incite laughter and create a release from the bonds of everyday life. When the performances shifted to more public performances in the greater Philadelphia area, this laughter became problematic because people outside of the Mummers’ community stopped seeing the humor as such. The Mummers began to shift their performances of gender to a more passing and less parodic form of female impersonation at about that time.

Susan Davis refers to this problem of larger community interpretation of female impersonation in the early 1800s in her book *Parades and Power*. She claims, “Women’s dress provided an easy and familiar costume, with a radically altered appearance” (106). She continues by recounting the problems these young men faced with the law, if caught. She recounts:

As a description from 1846 indicates: “Three nice young men put forth with some twenty or thirty of their jolly companions to have a grand promenade. Their habits were in such bad taste they were caught foul and with all their trappings, flounces, bustles and all, politely gallanted to the watch house.” In court the judge imposed a staggering fine of \$300 each, pointing out that “nothing is more offensive in the eye of the law... than the assumption that which by nature and art we are not and cannot be.” although authorities viewed Christmas masking with uneasiness, penalties were not usually so severe. (106).

The business of female impersonation soon shifted to something of a more serious job.

“There were also Glamor Girls, 1939 style. These gals really know how to strut their stuff—within reason, of course” (Brookhouser).

As the Mummies became a more officially sanctioned event, the female impersonators took a dramatic turn towards a passing form of the performance. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* first notes the female impersonator costume as an official prize category in 1895—the same year that the move toward official city sponsorship took over (“King Momus Ruled”). From then on, newspaper articles and official Mummer documentation not only claim the female impersonator as an official costume category but also emphasize the passing form of the costume category.

Within the first few years of the official parade, the female impersonators were considered so good at passing for biological females that they were required to follow all rules of propriety for biological women. For example, an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states, “Chairman Joseph R.C. McAllister of the Special New Year Committee of Councils . . . cautioned the paraders against any display that might be thought to exceed the bounds of propriety” (“King Momus’ Glittering Retinue”). As time went on, these rules became even stricter, showing the increasing emphasis on the believability of these female impersonators.

From the first year of the official sanctioning of the parade, the female impersonators tried to push the limits of propriety while still passing as women. In 1902, two female impersonators from the Elkton Club were fined for vulgarity because of the “breeziness of their apparel” (Hansberry 26). The following year, John Duffy, a top prize-winning female impersonator, tricked at least a dozen police officers into enforcing the “no women in the line of march” rule (Hansberry 31). This challenge extended to other female impersonators who attempted to dethrone Duffy in the coming years. Fooling the police was one of the most important tests for the believability of a female impersonator’s costume in the first decade of the official parade (Hansberry 32).

By 1907, hundreds of female impersonators invaded the parade, so by the end of the first decade they started to elicit little to no reaction from the crowds at each parade. This increased saturation led to more extreme measure in terms of convincing the audiences that the impersonators were actually women. The female impersonators tried harder to fool the audiences and the judges by placing an emphasis on passing as biological women (Hansberry 42). Numerous accounts tell of female impersonators collapsing from exposure to the cold New Year’s Day weather. Tales of the parades of 1917 and 1918 tell of female impersonators’ unsuccessful attempts to brave the cold (Hansberry 83-7). In 1928, a dozen female impersonators who refused to cover their shoulders were pulled from the line of march, because it was too cold for ladies to expose their shoulders (Hansberry 125).

Thus, the regulatory fiction of gender, to use Butler’s theories, became even more ensconced in the Mummies community by the end of the 1920s. For Butler, the performative nature of sex and gender is largely perpetuated discursively and becomes regulatory in that it controls the way people act or perform (171). With repetition, the language of the parade and the discourse that framed the gender performance in the parade created a very clear understanding of

the regulations of the Mummers community. The Mummers played with the rules of propriety for biological females outside of their community by following or breaking them in the moment of performance of female impersonation. Additionally, this shift towards a discourse of regulation within the performances connected over to the performances of community that likewise became more regulated via propriety. By the 1920s, the passing style of female impersonation in the parade was so great that these men were treated as women when in the space of performance. The records of these passing performances are numerous. In contrast, very little record of Laura Lee's performance remains, marking the distinction between those within the community and those on the outside via the archive.

September 15, 2008: I search and search the historical society's database. "Your search has resulted in no hits!" flashes on the screen no matter what combination of words I use in the search fields. Laura Lee eludes me. I pick up my copy of her seminal piece: "Real Girl Dances in Mummer Throng." Her smirk taunts me from the pages of history. I can almost hear her laugh as she walks right past the written histories available to me today. This article is one of the few pieces of history proving her existence. She escapes me in every other way.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

In historical records, Laura Lee is a ghost. Because the Historical Society of Pennsylvania had only one record related to her existence, and the Mummers Museum had nothing, I searched the Philadelphia City Directory and the United States Census Reports from 1900 to 1940, with very little success. No record of Lee exists in the 1925 city directory. I can only assume that she was not yet a resident of Philadelphia. In 1930, Laura J. Lee appears in *Polk's Philadelphia City Directory* with a residence at 115 Beechwood Street in Philadelphia. The directory lists her occupation as "Reporter for *Evening Bulletin*" (*Polk's Philadelphia City Directory*). By the 1935-6 directory, her entry has disappeared.

A similar pattern follows in the US Census reports. A search of *Laura Lee*, without her middle initial, *J*, brings up her record in 1930. The record claims that she rented her residence for

which she paid \$70 per month in rent. That rent translates to roughly \$1000 by today's standards, an amount that's extraordinary when you consider that she was a single woman in the 1930s (See *Measuring Worth*). Her occupation is listed as "reporter" for "newspaper." The record also says that she was thirty-two in 1930 and was born circa 1898 in Kansas to Russian parents ("Laura Lee").

In trying to trace Lee's existence back to before she got to Philadelphia, I can find no record of her existence anywhere. The census does not include any record of her before or after the 1930 entry, and birth records show no births of girls from 1897 to 1900 in Kansas with the last name of Lee. Additionally, she disappears in 1940 census report records. My guess is that she wrote under an alias—one she took so seriously in 1930 that she assumed that identity even in the census report. Another explanation could come from the fact that she was Russian and might have changed her name some time before 1930 in order to simplify it or Americanize it. This theory would not explain why she disappeared after the 1930 census, however.

Lee's historicity is an important thread in the performance of gender and community in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. The Mummers have spread the rumor that Lee entered the parade only as a way to secure a position at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*. If this was true, one might expect to find articles penned by Lee in subsequent issues of the paper. Problematically, however, the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* lists no bylines for local reports. The bulk of their articles are from Reuters and the Associated Press. In the 1930s, articles written by staff writers go without names, causing further confusion in this research. The only articles that include bylines are editorials and, ironically, women's pieces. If Lee wanted recognition and fame, as the Mummers claim, she certainly did not earn that as a staff reporter for the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*. In fact, someone actively attempting to prove her existence can hardly do so via her professional vita or city and federal records.

For the Mummies, Lee's story has been inscribed into their collective memory. The Mummies do not remember Lee's participation fondly. All published accounts of Lee's story indicate one of two conclusions on the part of the Mummies: (1) The whole thing was a hoax and she never actually marched; or (2) She busted into the parade without consideration for the rules of the community, thereby hurting the community for self-serving purposes. Not once do the Mummies articulate a questioning of their emphasis on passable female impersonation via Lee's participation, or consider the fact that her participation might provide evidence that other women have marched as well. Instead, the Mummies focus on her impact on the rules of propriety (Hansberry 127-230; Masters 89; Welch 50, 138). Therefore, regardless of her ghost-like existence within the pages of history, Laura Lee has claimed a space in the history of the Mummies Parade by changing the collective memory of this otherwise all-male event.

Even though records about Laura Lee are few and incomplete, her impact on the Mummies Parade remains. First, some Mummies try to deny Lee's actions—questioning the accuracy of her article. For example, Edgar Williams wrote in 1977 about Lee in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He wrote:

In 1920, Laura Lee, a Philadelphia newspaperwoman, put on an Eskimo outfit and came up the street with a comic division group depicting Commander Richard E. Byrd and his party at the South Pole. Unreconstructed Mummies still deny it happened, but there is documentary and photographic evidence that it did. (23)

Despite the incorrect date in Williams' report, he otherwise depicts the Mummies' views on Lee accurately. Lee repeatedly insinuates herself into situations for which she was probably not actually present. Because of the way Lee wrote and her extensive self-implication, it is fairly easy to question the accuracy of her article. The questioning might lead to a rational theory that

the whole thing was a hoax. Because Lee seems to be ubiquitous in her article, a lot of it reads as fiction.

Additionally, Mummies try to deny Lee's participation or use her actions to further define appropriate Mummer behavior by explaining that her behavior is the antithesis of correct Mummery. Although the reporter writes in a professional fashion in her article about the events she experienced from the inside, the Mummies and their allies write of her inappropriate behavior. Perhaps most importantly the Mummies concentrate on how she betrayed the rule—women do not march in the Mummies Parade—thereby reinforcing her clear outsider status. In this way, Lee's article stands as an attempt to understand an exclusive culture paralleled with the Mummies' attempts to exclude her from that culture based on her actions.

Hansberry is also careful to note that Lee's participation merely reinforced her outsider status when it came to the community. Hansberry claims, "Every woman who lived in South Philadelphia knew her place in the world of Mummery and it was never in the line of march" (129). By marching in the parade, Lee not only reinforced the appropriateness of non-performance participation on the part of Mummies women, but also showed that she was not one of them, and therefore not credible. Lee marched in the parade to get a job. She did not actually want to be a Mummer. This fact coupled with the explicit break in propriety served only to buttress the community position that women should not march in the parade. Lee got what she wanted (a job) and the Mummies could keep what they wanted (a male-only line). This opinion about Lee's actions is a perfect example of Certeau's theories on propriety. He states that "Propriety imposes an ethical justification of behaviors that is intuitively measurable because it distributes them along an organizing axis of value judgments" (17). Lee's actions were completely ethical in her world. She needed a job or she just needed a story. The Mummies' system of ethics and value judgments places her story much further down on the scale. The only

important rule is the rule about how women may participate in the parade, and Lee broke that rule. In doing so, she broke propriety. In breaking propriety, she would never be accepted as a Mummer. Because she so clearly came from the outside, the Mummies resented her selfish behavior all the more (Hansberry 129-30; Masters 89).

Hansberry's account of the first fifty years of the parade also focuses on the idea that Lee's act stole attention away from the more important issue of McHugh's retirement from the parade. According to the early reports of the official parade detailed in Hansberry's book, leading up to the 1929 parade, two factors competed for control of the attention: the weather and McHugh's retirement. Lee's participation overshadowed both the unfortunate weather and the important political move within McHugh's retirement, thereby further reinforcing the importance of the Mummies' rules of propriety.

The Mummies were used to competing with the weather on New Year's Day, and the weather had won three out of five years from 1925 to 1929. This fight was commonplace. Mother Nature was a fickle foe, but the Mummies knew her game and would continue to do battle for attention on New Year's Day. Laura Lee brought with her an unwelcome fight, according to Hansberry—one that questioned the all-male participation in the Mummies and one that threatened to disrupt the future of that community rule and therefore all rules of propriety. McHugh held an important position in the Mummies' male hierarchy. He had fought for their rights since before the city officially adopted the parade. McHugh was a Mummer through and through: he had been through the early parades when they were small community-organized parties; he had been through the city's attempted bans on the parade; and he had worked to have the parade accepted by the city. McHugh represented the true patriarchal lineage of the parade. By choosing to enter into the parade that particular year, Lee served only to show the Mummies what they were preventing: a fall of their male lineage.



Lee also chose to march during one of the years that propriety was most clearly reinforced in the male participants. McHugh believed strongly in a sense of decorum. He had fought long and hard to get the Mummers sanctioned by the city government, and through that battle he had learned how important it was to maintain a sense of dignity in the parade. Through the 1800s, the city and citizens who did not participate in New Year's Day events saw the Shooters as rowdy, rude, and unkempt. Attempts to outlaw the Mummers called upon this inappropriate and dangerous behavior as evidence. In response, the Mummers who fought for city support felt strongly about decorum. Passable female impersonation with the maintenance of the aforementioned outside rules of gender propriety within the parade itself was one form of this decorum (Masters 43-45). In 1929, after a decade of increasingly rowdy behavior, McHugh put his foot down by enforcing these rules of decorum. Lee entered into the parade in complete agreement with the rules of propriety. She covered her shoulders and arms. In every way but one Lee showed her ability to follow the tacit and written rules of the Mummers Parade. The one rule she could not follow involved her sex. She was a female and females did not march in the parade.

This juxtaposition between McHugh's ultimate Mummer position and Lee's clear break in propriety only served to reinforce the values behind the all-male rule in the parade. Despite the fact that Lee was ultimately successful in her performance, her actions showed everyone what was possible if the rules of propriety were not upheld, and therefore supported the need for a communal understanding about the parade rules. If Lee could and did enter the parade undetected, who is to say that other women could not and did not? Instead of causing Mummers to question their emphasis on the propriety of a passable female impersonation, Lee's actions simply reinforced their emphasis on propriety in the performance of community. They did not have to alter their emphasis; they had to be more vigilant about reinforcing their participation

rules. As Foucault states about panoptic power in *Discipline and Punish*, “Thanks to the mechanisms of observation, [power] gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate men’s behavior” (204). Although Lee got away with entering the parade, her article reminded the Mummers that they needed to be vigilant about the constant observation. If the Mummers did not constantly watch their own community, some outsider might enter and ruin their disciplined community. In this way, Lee advanced the power of the community and ensured an extension of the rules about gender in the parade.

In many ways, however, Lee also carefully reinforced the Mummers’ attitudes and arguments within her own article. As previously mentioned, Lee’s remarks about the ways she could not live up to the required physical stress of mumming throughout her article supported the all-male rule. By explicitly ignoring the rules and by reinforcing the physical prowess required for the job of coming up Broad Street, Lee opened up an interesting juxtaposition. On one hand, the Mummers should be so female that they should follow all gendered codes of conduct. On the other hand, Mummers should be not so passable that they could show that women could march. So, rather than hurting the Mummers’ sense of propriety, Lee actually helped bring them closer together, while buttressing this paradox of female participation in the parade. She proved with her own writing that although she did complete the event, women could not successfully be Mummers.

December 21, 2007; 6:30pm: I talk to a new friend about the upcoming Mummers Parade over coffee. He has been in a string band for 25 years. I express my anxiety about the performance, but he assures me that I have nothing to worry about. “Just don’t worry about the girls that day,” he cautions. I ask what he means, and he looks out the window. “Well, ya know... sometimes they get weird about girls hanging out with their husbands and boyfriends...”

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

Patricia Anne Masters, much like Hansberry, focuses on the cultural reasoning behind the exclusion of women in the parade. Women supported the parade in other, equally important

ways, according to Masters. The earliest parades and festivities asked women to step to the background. The theory behind the early celebrations held that a man had to step over the home's threshold first in order to bring good luck. Understanding this superstition, but still wanting to participate in the fun, women took to sewing costumes for the men and cooking stew for the boys who participated (Welch 50). Masters notes, "Women's roles in the Mummer community reflected traditional female roles enacted in the wider society" (87). The women did not participate in public activity, and the Mummies wanted to keep it that way both in larger society and in the parade.

After all, the Mummies men and women were not apolitical on the subject of women's rights. In fact, the Mummies had a reputation for performing some of the most important political issues of the day. For example, in 1914, women's rights took center stage in the Comic division. The Brown New Year's Association paraded with a "scathing lampooning of Suffragettes" as their theme (Hansberry 73). The Mummies wore their politics on their sleeve, especially in the Comic division; however, in the Mummies associations and in the larger society, women did not participate in politics or public life. The years leading up to 1914 revealed similar opinions on voting. The costumes in 1914, however, were explicit: women should not participate in public life. For example, one float depicted a baby farm, citing its inevitability if women were to start to participate in politics (Hansberry73). The parading male Mummies were clear about their opinions via the parade themes, but the female partners and family members of Mummies also showed their support of these rules with their vocal support of the rules of propriety and their tacit support of the all-male hierarchy.

Women were highly active in parade-related activities but followed the social rules of greater society by not publicly participating in the parade. Women were the moral support for their husbands and male family members who were Mummies. Instead of participating in the

actual parade women participated in separate organizations. Although women actively supported the parade from its earliest days, records show that the women only organized their activities into auxiliary groups after the parade became officially sanctioned (Hansberry 73). One example of such a group is the Ferko Ladies Auxiliary, which existed to support the men's activities. A women's version of the Mummies, the auxiliary club charged dues, held fundraisers, and made costumes. They did everything the men did except perform in the parade and socialize in the clubhouse. This auxiliary group, and other similar groups, set up a separate space within which the women of the Mummies community could work (Masters 87-8).

Women's auxiliaries did a lot of work to support the male performers through the 1970s. For example, one call for women in the Crean Fancy group outlines how the women supported the men. This 1958 call came from Palma Lucas, the current director of the Mummies Museum. The letter invites all women to join in the group and sets up a few guidelines. It explains that all meetings were held at Palma's house and that the dues were \$1 per month. The group was in charge of fundraising for the men, something they accomplished via social gatherings and monthly bingo games. At the end of the call, however, the letter shows that the auxiliary club was not for women only. It says, "invite your cousins and aunts; sisters and friends; neighbors and coworkers; your grandmothers and crazy uncles" (Lucas). Although I cannot be sure if that comment was made for pure comedic relief, the letter does indicate a kind of relaxed social atmosphere.

Despite the implied relaxed atmosphere, these auxiliary groups institutionalized the gender separation within the Mummies Parade, creating separate gendered spaces via performance and discourse. In doing so, the auxiliary groups helped support the power of the rules about women's participation in the parade. They actively supported the men's performance

by institutionalizing that support in auxiliary groups. If a woman, or a non-performer, did not participate in the support groups, then she was not a good supportive member of the community.

Other than the auxiliary clubs, the Mummers made the occasional exceptions to the male-only performance rule. These exceptions, however, did more to reinforce the separation than challenge it. For example, in 1940, the Mummers allowed a “Girls’ Band from Buffalo” to parade with the rest of the string bands during the Show of Shows, a string band show that normally runs in mid to late February (“It’s a Man’s World”). According to *The Mummers Magazine*, parade officials fielded dozens of requests for permits to march from female bands from all across the country for the 1941 parade. The article in the 1957 *Mummers Magazine* claims: “In fact, two formidable female clubs turned up for the New Year’s Parade equipped with banjos, mandolins, and violins and almost fought their way into the string band section” (13). Instead of opening the door for female participation in the actual parade, this special exception in the Show of Shows seems to only have reinforced the idea that women should not participate in the actual parade because when the Mummers made minor concessions to the women, the women asked for more.

In the same way that Lee’s article upheld the values of sex separation in the parade, the reports of the exception as well as the attempts to enter into the parade undetected are filled with the idea that women are neither qualified for the job of strutting up Broad Street nor required to make the parade complete. As the aforementioned 1957 article claims, “Maybe some day the gate may be opened for the gals but at the present time they are represented by the numerous female impersonators who lend a note of feminine gaiety and color to this manly enterprise” (13). In other words, the only thing women bring to a show is femininity, but in the Mummers, the men are fully capable of bringing both the masculinity required to strut up Broad Street and the femininity required to put on a good show. Exceptions to the rule only serve to reinforce it.

Additionally, the article in the Mummies Magazine challenges the idea that the rule against women's participation was in fact unofficial. Although the article does not point to an officially written rule, it buttresses the idea that every parade participant must obtain a permit or a badge, something easily denied to women. The men were always in control of whether or not women could participate and with the exception of this band from Buffalo and a girl named Mary Troitia who marched with one of the bands in 1946, women were denied permission to march in the parade ("It's a Man's World").

January 1, 2009; 10:30am: I start walking along side the Golden Sunrise group, scanning the spectators for obvious tourists. As I jog to get better pictures from in front of the group, I see a group of comics getting on a horse. Confused, I say to myself, "But women and horses are not allowed in the Mummies Parade!"  
– Excerpt from author's field notes

The first official protests against the Mummies for their rules about female participation are rumored to have occurred in 1972. That year spectators were met at City Hall with signs that read, "Our Motto Is- Stop Sweeping and Start Flying" and "Women and Horses are not allowed in the Mummies Parade" (Welch 165)! The women protesters passed out pamphlets to the crowds that claimed "We want to see a future that includes women as strong, free, happy human beings, not as the Women's Auxiliary of the human race or the Mummies Parade" (Welch 165). Their protests, however, hardly took center that year or in the future. In fact, neither the *Philadelphia Inquirer* nor the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* covered the protests. This lack of written history might not mean that the protests never occurred; however, the lack of mention about the protests in Mummies' archival collection is important to understanding how the Mummies have written and performed their own histories.

By 1975, the tides were changing and women started participating in the parade. The Dick Crean Band allowed the first women to march officially in the parade. In 1975, Maryjean Maahs and Kathy McFadden broke the exclusion publically, but the band placed just seventh that

year. Although women had finally broken into the ranks of the string bands, they were still not a selling point toward winning top prize (Welch 166-169). That same year, however, the Liberty Comics also had two girls march with them, though the girls were not official, and the club took first prize. Rumors spread that the club won because of the girls. An article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* fueled the fire with its headline, “Liberty Comics Win with Girls” (qtd. in Dibiase). Immediately following that headline, however, Frank Dibiase, the captain of the Liberty Comics, released a letter protesting the implications of the articles. Mr. Dibiase reiterates in the letter that the Liberty Comics have won first prize numerous times in the past: 1958; 1959; 1960; 1964; 1967; 1974; and finally 1975. In contrast to the implications of the article, Dibiase says that the club won the prize because of their “hard work and monies,” not because of the girls. In fact, the letter claims that the club officers did not know about the girls, and had they known, they would not have allowed them to march. Dibiase argues, “All the Mummies have going for them is their tradition” (Dibiase). By sneaking in, he suggests, these women were not Mummies and therefore could not have played a role in their victory.

Dibiase ends the letter by reinforcing the commitment of the female relatives that are involved in the club from an auxiliary perspective. He says, “But our own female witches who are the backbone of the club would never break tradition” (Dibiase). Again, female usurpers reinforced the propriety of tradition that only men really participate in the Mummies. Despite the fact that in that same year of 1975 two women marched with a string band club officially, tradition won out, as women were not truly accepted until years later.

In fact, Charles Welch argues that even through the 1980s when women started participating in greater numbers, winning prizes and even leading clubs, the tradition of all-male membership prevailed tacitly. In 1987, a female spectator remarked, “It’s not for women. Men started the tradition. They should let them have it that way” (Welch 168). Similarly, Fred

Calandra also remarked that year that female participation in the parade created friction between the club members. Some band members also made comments that reinforced the idea that they were weary of their female members. They did not want people to think they won prizes because of their female members and they did not want to seem too soft for having women among their ranks. It just didn't follow tradition (Welch 169).

January 30, 2008; 5:30pm: I leaf through my pictures from my recent trip to Philadelphia and pass them over to my friend. "Wow!" She says, "This guy is amazing!" I look at the picture in her hands and explain that I am the Mummer in that picture. "I thought women weren't allowed to be Mummers," she remarks as she studies the picture further.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

Even though women did not officially start to march with the Mummers until 1975, women have clearly been a significant part of the Mummers community. More importantly, however, every woman I spoke to said that women have marched side by side with the men since the early 1960s. When I spoke to Palma Lucas, she immediately responded, "But we've been out there with the guys since the '60s." She even recounts dozens of stories from her early years in the parade. For example, when she first started working with the Mummers, it was uncommon to have women around in the warehouses. She tells stories about the men cursing and letting out various bodily noises, forgetting that she was there working right next to them.

In addition, I could find no evidence to support the idea that feminists protested in the 1970s in order to get into the parade. Palma Lucas, John Lucas, and the dozens of other Mummers I asked have no memory of any protests. Both Palma and John argue that girls started parading in honor of their families, just like the boys did. They both pointed to dozens of examples of women marching before 1975 when word was official that women could march despite the fact that all archival texts indicate otherwise. Why then do the stories and articles emphasize a different history?



The performance of gender has historically positioned the Mummies in a paradox. This paradox has created two seemingly contradictory conditions: (1) The male Mummies have historically both excluded women and performed the feminine element on their own; but (2) by focusing on the passing form of their female impersonation, they have opened up a space in which women could sneak into the parade. This paradox historically created a dynamic that reinforced propriety within the Mummies community by using the critical gaze of performers to maintain rules of conduct. This focus on the parade as a propriety-driven community helped maintain the need for critical observation of all members of the community. The Mummies as a community, therefore, have attempted to emphasize their ability to control their community via propriety, whereas these stories of protestors and usurpers counter the history the Mummies tell.

The passing nature of the female impersonation performances caused a playful and critical gaze from the audience members who never could be completely sure that they were viewing female impersonators instead of females. As Lee's participation reinforced, this male-only female impersonation rule was always at stake. When it was only men who performed in the parade, the audience members and performers could use their gazes to be fairly certain that they were viewing drag performances. In this way, the rules of propriety were clearly maintained via the juxtaposition of female impersonation in an exclusively male performance tradition. When women participated either as usurpers such as Laura Lee or as officially accepted Mummies, the maintenance of propriety continued. Usurpers showed the failure of women's attempted participation and the need for more stringent observation and propriety, whereas the officially accepted women showed the continued male control over this propriety.

As women have become more common in the parade, there has been a shift away from strict propriety. The Mummies look back on the all-male years with nostalgia, often using those years as an example of clear propriety. This change from an all-male event to a coed parade

clearly affected the Mumpers performance of gender both from within the community and from the perspective of the larger Philadelphia community.

The Mumpers were not until recently a bunch of cross-dressing freaks according to outsiders. As long as the Mumpers held up their strict all-male form, the groups appeared to be completely masculine men performing an acceptable propriety-supported drag performance for a short period of time. The male lineage showed the boundaries of their community and the performances on New Year's Day were a continuation of the strictly gendered world in which they lived. When women entered the parade, however, their ability to continue with this social control faltered, as did outside opinion.

The larger public now views the Mumpers as a bunch of straight white men who dress up in drag for fun, despite the fact that there is less cross-dressing now than there was before women joined the parade. Numerous blogs and public opinion pieces support this changed opinion. For example, an article in the City Paper explains that "The secret: All Mumpers are actually gay" (Swierczynski). A similar point remains throughout a lot of other popular references to the Mumpers. The Urban dictionary posts the following definition for Mumpers:

Grown men dress like women and bums get wacked on drugs and booze, play banjos, tubas, and flutes while running through the streets causing mayhem. The mumpers are divided by brigades, fancies, comics, gays, trannies, post and pre op transsexuals. Mumpers are known to take a full year to make their costumes. Women are prohibited from becoming mumpers. Sexual relations between the mummer men is commonplace as their judgment is often so impaired during the parade. ("Mumpers")

Obviously this is another attempt at humor, but the point remains that popular opinion about the Mumpers now commonly returns to the conflation between sexuality and gender.

I cannot argue that this change in opinion has only to do with the introduction of women into the parade. Cultural times have also changed since women have joined the parade, and much of this critique might have more to do with the fact that gay and lesbian issues are more public now than they ever have been in the past. This critique on the Mummies' sexuality is simply a conflation of sexuality and gender. The Mummies are not considered gay as much as not masculine in current popular opinion, and although that change in opinion probably has more to do with the change in cultural politics, these opinions have also affected the Mummies' performances and the community's own understanding of itself and its history.

Therefore, unlike with the performances of race, which stand side by side with issues of strategic invisibility and community legitimacy; the performances of gender in the Mummies Parade support a paradox that leads to stringent propriety in the community. As times have changed, the Mummies Parade has shifted away from this strict sense of propriety. In allowing the performances to change, the Mummies have both secured and jeopardized their community. By adapting to the changes in outside culture in reference to issues of gender, the Mummies have been able to include more people at a time when membership is wavering. This change, however, has come with a price: the outside public has started to see the Mummies as gender deviants and the Mummies struggle to regain the sense of propriety, which they once used to define their community.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the Mummies' understandings of their community via their history reveals an attempt to hold onto a strict sense of propriety. In the last twenty-five years, propriety has fallen to the background, however. Although this change is probably completely unrelated to the inclusion of women into the parade, the Mummies tell a history that emphasizes this loss *due to* the changes in participation rules. In my discussions with an unnamed Mummer, he clearly stated, "The good old days, when, ya know, no offense, but you

ladies weren't in the parade as much ... I don't know ... You just saw better behavior ... Now, it's ...” This Mummer understands the history, as do other Mummers, to be one of loss. In understanding their community via their history with gender, the Mummers clearly attempt to reclaim this propriety of years past, with very little success.

January 1, 2008; 2:30pm: I dance and strut in circles, trying to keep my energy up, despite the small crowds. I strut towards a group of audience members, trying to help the excitement of the parade. Just before I reach the group, one of the men yells “fag!” I continue with my performance, pretending I didn't hear him.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

## CHAPTER FOUR KING FOR A DAY

### Class in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade

December 28, 2007; 3:30pm: John Lucas observes as I try on the leather harness he has lent me for my back-piece on New Year's Day. Palma comes over to check the fit and tighten the straps for me. "You have to get some meat on those bones," she says as she pulls the straps tighter. I walk back over to John and ask him if he thinks it looks good. "You better not lose that!" he barks back at me. "That costume is worth a lot of money," he continues. John goes on to tell me the exact cost of my back-piece and leather vest harness. The vest has been made by an Amish leatherworker and costs about \$200. The back piece, however, is the big-ticket item. Each group of a dozen plumes costs \$56. There are at least twenty dozen plumes on this costume, which comes out to well over \$1000. I nod along with his story, periodically agreeing not to lose anything.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

Participation in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade is an expensive endeavor in contemporary times. Materials for costumes, especially those of the Fancy division and some of the string bands, cost a lot of money, as mentioned in the opening for this chapter. Although cash prizes have been awarded since 1895, the award money has never been comparable to the costs of the materials, even if one were guaranteed a prize every year. Additionally, the membership dues, fees for fundraisers, and cost of labor time add up to a huge amount for many Mummers. Despite this cost, the parade has always been associated with the lower, working-class communities of South Philadelphia.

Historically, class in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade has not always been the thing it is today. Although class has always been an important shaping device for the parade community, different periods in history reveal different performances and epistemologies of class. For example, in the earliest days of the celebration, in the early to mid-1800s, the performances relied upon a "bring what you have" grassroots style of performance. The participants raided their sparse closets to find costume parts (Hansberry 2-7). In these early days, the Mummers used their celebrations as ways to publicly show their working-class status in direct comparison

to the upper-class communities of Center City. Costumes in the early 1900s and today, however, emphasize financial extravagance, publicly communicating the Mummers' attempts to be associated with this wealth and the upper class. Because of these contrasting orientations in the performance of class in the parade, the Mummers have struggled to maintain their stake in Philadelphia via their community's identity of socioeconomic class.

Additionally, attempts to ban the parade shaped different views of the Mummers' class through history. During most of the 1800s, Quakers tried to ban the Mummers' celebrations, so parade performers often did not know if the festivities would happen from year to year. In response, Mummers used what was easily available to them in terms of costuming and even celebration tactics. The strategies used by these early Mummers often resulted in raggedy clothes, female impersonations, and wild bursts of celebrations, which caused many citizens of Philadelphia to perceive the Mummers to be out of control hoodlums. Mummers who tried to celebrate secretly as a way to get past the legal regulations, were often caught and arrested, which only further exacerbated the perception that the Mummers were classless hooligans (Welch 1-30).

Davis argues that this kind of street theatre in the early to mid-1800s was important to the working class. The parades and celebrations helped the working class gain space or a symbolic stake in Philadelphia in the post-Civil War years. Davis argues that there was hostility towards working class collection at that time. Because of the cold weather during the winter in Philadelphia, many workers were unemployed around Christmas and New Year's. This unemployment led to rowdy Christmas and New Year's celebrations, which disgraced the city (Davis 44). Davis claims, "Mockeries and maskings provided a distinctive mode of political expression for the city's poor and working peoples, who used irreverent spectacles to make political demands, propose alternatives to affluent Philadelphians' social styles, and identify

antagonists” (73). Indeed these early Mummers’ performances involved political commentary in their carnivalesque styles; however, the attempts to ban the parades resulted in another interesting dynamic that has rolled over into contemporary dynamics in the Mummers community.<sup>1</sup>

As attempts to control the Mummers via legal regulations failed, the city reconsidered strategies. In the late 1800s, after more than fifty years of attempted legal bans against the Mummers, a few businessmen came up with a new idea: they could control the Mummers’ activities by bribing them with cash prizes. Or maybe the businessmen thought they could profit from the social and legal battles associated with the Mummers (Hansberry 3). Regardless, this financial sponsorship led to the official city adoption of the parade less than a decade later and even further official fiscal influence over the parade. From this introduction of institutionally driven financial control, the performance of class took an important shaping turn. Philadelphians’ views of the Mummers went from those of classless hooligans to those of refined performers within a span of a couple of years; however, later, as the socioeconomic situation of the city changed, this class-based identity of the Mummers also changed outside views of the parade community. Thus, the Mummers have struggled to understand their community via its histories of class in this volatile economic world.

In approaching an analysis of class and the Mummers, I am faced with a thin theoretical canon at best. Through postmodern and post-structural theory history, socioeconomic class has been absorbed into theories of race or placed at the margins of the discussion in favor of discussions about gender, race, and sexuality (O’Hara 406). Although different identity categories and theories overlap extensively, it is just as important to deal with issues of class and race individually as it is with theories of gender and sexuality. By conflating the ideas of class

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<sup>1</sup> Davis’ work does not deal with the changes in the Mummers’ socioeconomic class identity that I point to here.

and race, especially as related to the Mummers Parade, one is ignoring the important historical nuances that have helped make the parade community what it is today. Therefore, a separate genealogy of the performance of class in the parade reveals significant ways the Philadelphia Mummers Parade community makes sense of and legitimizes itself within the larger community of Philadelphia.

For purposes of this argument, I use a Gramscian theoretical perspective. Antonio Gramsci is an important twentieth century Marxist thinker. During a twenty year period of imprisonment, he wrote extensive works of history and analysis known as the *Prison Notebooks*. This multiple volume work includes his theories on many subjects, such as his theory of cultural hegemony as related to socioeconomic class. He devised the concept of hegemony to explain why the communist revolutions Marx predicted did not occur. Marx suggested that the rise of industrialism would create a huge working class, economic recessions, and therefore a revolution of the working class. Although Marx and Engels explicitly predicted this impending revolution in 1848, many decades later the workers had still not carried out this mission. Instead, a large middle class formed out of the industrial revolution; something Marx failed to predict (Boggs 121-7).

In response to these problems within Marx's theories, Gramsci argued that the workers did not revolt because their ideology swayed over to that of the dominant society. In other words, the masses of workers absorbed the perspective of the ruling class via hegemony. For Gramsci, capitalist societies use compulsory schooling, mass media, and popular culture as hegemonic cultural innovations that indoctrinate those of the lower or marginalized classes. Therefore, workers listened to the rhetoric of the ruling classes and began to seek a middle class status via competition, consumerism, and individualism. These primary goals, then, replaced the desire or need for a workers revolution (Boggs 216-7). In terms of the Mummers, by considering



what cultural norms, such as institutions, practices, and beliefs, are at work historically one can recognize how the Mummers' sense of class has been indoctrinated from the larger cultural ideologies of Philadelphia's rich. Additionally, using a Gramscian perspective allows this study to look how the Mummers use their sense of class from history as a way to understand themselves contemporarily. In other words, this chapter answers the questions: what common sense about class in the parade community is being generated? How do the Mummers benefit from this common sense? What function does this common sense serve?

Thus, this genealogy of socioeconomic class in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade focuses on how the parade community has internalized this hatred of a low-class hooligan view of the parade and accepted the appreciation of an upper-class, materially-based experience. I begin with a turn to the early history of the parade before the official city adoption using the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* financial sponsorship of the parade as the primary point of orature. This chapter travels through the increase in financial influence leading up to the city's adoption of the parade. I then skip forward to two key points in history that influence and illustrate the Mummers' views of their socioeconomic class identity: those of World War I and the Great Depression. Lastly, I reveal how these different understandings of class situate the parade in the contemporary Philadelphia community, which is struggling with economic problems. In sum, I argue that the Mummers have used the financial cost of their parade since the official adoption to legitimize the parade community and distance themselves from their working class past. Because the Mummers continue to self-identify as working class, however, they struggle to negotiate a commitment to their own community history and attempts to legitimize their community within Philadelphia. The study must begin in the earliest days of the celebration.

August 25, 2008; 9:15am: Maria, the undergraduate administrator in the Communication Department at Villanova University collects my final employment paperwork and tries to make small talk. She asks me why I am in the

area, and when I tell her I am writing about the Mummers, she quickly tells me that the husband of the other administrator, Loretta, is a Mummer. “Loretta! She’s writing about the Mummers,” Maria calls out. Loretta comes over to ask me questions. What group am I working with? What division? Have I ever marched before? I start telling her about my first experience with marching from that January and inquire about her husband. “Oh, he’s a comic,” she tells me nonchalantly. When I ask more, she explains that he doesn’t really do a lot of fancy costume-making. Instead, her husband is one of hundreds of comics who make costumes out of household items; “The way they used to,” she says proudly.  
– Excerpt from author’s field notes

In the early days of the parade, revelers made costumes out of whatever they had in part because of their limited resources and in part due to the history of the practice. In the early years of the 1800s the working-class men and women of South Philadelphia imitated the upper-class custom of calling, which was itself an imitation of something George Washington was rumored to have done. In this upper-class custom, the people came calling to their friends’ and family’s homes on New Year’s Day. Because it was good luck for a man to enter the home first, the men always dressed up so as to attract the attention of the person who opened the door. When the working-class people in South Philadelphia took over that custom, they changed much of it to their own liking and necessity, including the costuming (Welch 21-31).<sup>2</sup>

The new custom for the working class people did not involve calling, because working-class homes did not have room for visitors; instead, the South Philly residents used the city streets as their common area, and called upon friends and family in the streets (Welch 21-31). In these street celebrations, the lower-class Philadelphians used whatever costumes they could get their hands on. Hansberry claims that “Costuming meant something as simple as a frock coat turned inside out with ribbons and patches attached” (3). The costumes were simple, because

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<sup>2</sup> Davis claims a sort of inverted version of this history. She argues that the business-class people of Philadelphia used the working-class celebrations as an example of how to gain political power in the city. Although her research may be accurate, I focus my study on the relationship between the upper class and working class. First, all studies I have found documenting the Mummers outline the importance of the relationship between the working and upper classes. Additionally, the influence of the Mummers’ festivities on the business class is outside of the scope of this particular study.

they were made for a one day celebration and by people of working class means. The costumes were not the important part of the celebration; rather, the important part was the mockery of the silly customs of the upper-class genteel (Welch 25).

The costumes reflected this kind of imitation or mockery of the upper-class attire commonly worn in calling practices. Whereas the rich people wore their best clothes to attract an invitation into a home, the working-class people wore a parody of those upper-class best clothes. The white cloaks and silk hats that the early Mummers sometimes wore were made out of sheets and curtains and made fun of the upper-class practice of wearing light clothes that would easily be ruined by the dirt. Another working-class parody of upper class attire employed red paint on the reveler's nose to mimic the color of the rich people's noses when they had a bit too much to drink (Welch 23-28).

To mock the upper-class custom of calling, these street celebrations moved en masse to the front of a house. Once at the house, instead of politely calling and quietly or silently suggesting that the man of the group should enter first, the South Philadelphia revelers chanted rhymes and songs. They used fake swords and real guns to hold the members of the house hostage through their songs. Once the New Year had rung, they also shot their guns in the air and danced more in the streets of their South Philadelphia neighborhoods. These antics were ironic, and intended to make fun of the upper class practice of calling (Welch 21-28). In this ironic performance, the early Mummers gained a sense of community identity: one that was directly opposed to the ridiculous upper class.

Regardless of the humorous intent of the early Shooters, the Quakers in the government did not take kindly to these practices. In fact, the nickname of the Mummers, Shooters, comes from this history. Early Mummers are referred to as Shooters because one of the primary histories purports that the parade structure comes from a tradition known as "shooting."

According to Hansberry, the tradition ties back to a military tradition around the war of 1812 in which boys who were too young to serve in the military traveled from house to house, and bar to bar on New Year's Day. The boys knocked on the door, recited a poem designed to help them gain entrance to the home, and then shot off their guns—an act that immediately led to the granting of access to the home (Hansberry 1).<sup>3</sup> The Quakers liked neither the working-class Shooters nor the upper-class callers, so the more conservative folks in Philadelphia tried to outlaw both activities. The bans were finally somewhat successful in 1810 (Welch 31). Although this year conflicts with Hansberry's and Davis' accounts of the laws, it is commonly understood that for more than fifty years, the practices were called a "common nuisance" in Philadelphia and carried with them a fine of fifty to one thousand dollars (Welch 25; Hansberry 5).

In Welch's, Davis', and Hansberry's texts there is no evidence that the upper-class citizens were arrested for their celebrations, even after they were outlawed, which makes the Mummers' need to alter their celebrations even more interesting. Essentially, if the upper class continued to practice calling but the Mummers had to hide their mockery of calling, the Mummers most likely had to emphasize in-group practices or tacit regulations that were only understandable to members of their own community. This further defined the Mummers community at the time. During the fifty years of banning, the practice of mummery had to go underground and the specifics of the costumes and other practices reflect that subversive aspect.

For example, in 1840, a group of men organized to celebrate the New Year, but called themselves the Chain Gang, wearing clothes that reflected prison garb at the time. Another group called themselves the New Year's Calvary, playing off the growing interest in fraternal orders and militia groups; however, both groups quickly disbanded (Hansberry 4-5). Instead, the celebrations were independent and impromptu. In order to avoid legal ramifications, the men of

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<sup>3</sup> Davis refers to the militia practice in her text, but again, it is outside the scope of my study.

South Philadelphia celebrated the New Year in lower key fast explosions of shooting. By the time they had strutted their stuff and greeted their neighbors, the authorities did not have enough time to catch them. In these cases, the costumes often involved female impersonation, because the men had the means to impersonate women and escape notice on the street (Welch 25-31).

Toward the end of the 1800s, the Mummers groups began to form more publicly. Although the tradition of calling had gone out of style during the Civil War, the street celebrations had grown in popularity as Quaker influence waned (Hansberry 4-5). The groups became more organized and by 1880 official groups came together to march around South Philadelphia. At this time, the most popular and well-organized groups, the Golden Crown and the Silver Crown, functioned as fraternities and changed the tradition of shooting to one of masquerading—a custom that started to connect with the upper class, rather than mock it (Hansberry 6-8).

Because of the legal regulations banning the custom or perhaps because of the popular negative opinion of Shooters, there are no newspaper articles that highlight the specifics of the change to masquerading. Numerous newspaper articles and court documents between 1810 and 1870 report on the nuisance of the New Year's Shooters, though none of them mention the specifics of costuming or other practices involved with the switch to masquerades (Welch 24-31). It was not until later, when the practices of shooting and masquerading became even more reserved and accepted that newspapers began to discuss the practice again; ever reminding readers of the dangers of the history and the potentials of this history to return.

In this part of the history, it is quite difficult to tell whether or not Welch's and Hansberry's accounts of these early years are accurate. The two author's accounts very clearly differ in that Welch claims that the Quaker hatred of the Mummers was just a myth whereas Hansberry supports the argument of the Quaker's laws (Welch 24-31; Hansberry 6-8). In an

attempt to construct a genealogy of the class of the parade, it is in many ways more important to note the construction of this history via various cultural texts such as newspapers and oral history narratives than to isolate one truth. Pollock notes, “In historicity, the body practices history. It incarnates, mediates, and resists the metahistories with which it is impressed” (4). So too, the practice of writing this history has a way of pointing out how one true story does not exist in the archive, but is left to the bodily histories of the repertoire.

If the view of the Mummies as a nuisance was the only public identity of the Mummies the significance of this chapter may be moot. Instead, one notes a shift in public opinion about the Shooters, the Mummies, or the masqueraders toward the end of the 1800s as associated with an increasing control over the Mummies via a few primary methods: permit rules, a royal theme, and prize money. This study now turns to the first part of that shift as a way to flesh out the Mummies’ understandings of their community via the history of class.

January 1, 2009; 9:30am: I walk on the sidewalk as the Golden Sunrise New Year’s Association struts up the street. I snap a few photos, while I try to negotiate the relatively sparse crowds. A few blocks into the walk, Matt, the captain of Golden Sunrise, walks over to me as shouts, “get in here!” I tell him that I don’t have a permit and that I am not official this year. He simply says, “I don’t care! I want you walking with us!”

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

After the ban on the practices of shooting, mumming, and masquerading failed repeatedly, a new Philadelphia mayor tried another tactic: permits. An article entitled “The Masquers,” published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1884 outlines the mayor’s plan to deal with the Mummies. Essentially, he argues that the permits would help control the Mummies by requiring them to spend money to celebrate. This line of reasoning is particularly interesting because the permits were, by all other accounts, free (Masters 32; Welch 26; Hansberry 7). Although the celebrations were controlled in part by this semi-official permit requirement that attempted to make the revelers behave accordingly, the city did not consistently maintain the

rule. As a result, these permit rules were more theoretical than practical, and did not result in further control of the Mummers as planned. (Hansberry 10).

With the beginning of a new decade, however, came a new official rule about the permits. An article entitled “King Carnival’s Day” in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* outlines the official adoption of permit requirements related to the Mummers beginning in 1890. The article claims that 145 clubs registered for a permit, thereby creating a new tradition. According to the article, all rowdy behavior of past years was in the past, and the new revelers would “be on their ballroom behavior” (par. 4). In this way, the discourse about the permit regulations within official news sources appears to parallel the suggestion that the Mummers’ behavior would be more refined with increased control.

January 1, 2008; 4:30pm: I wait in line for my turn to strut in front of the judges. I pace back and forth, due to nerves. The trio in front of me passes around a small flask, but by the stench emanating from them I can tell that they need no more alcohol. My mind flashes back to the warning I got a few days earlier. I had mentioned something about Mummers drinking a lot— a clear reputation. Palma snapped back at me, “You can’t drink in that costume!” I assured her that I didn’t drink anyway, but she was off and running. She explained to me that she had seen John kick Mummers down the stairs into the subway when he caught them drinking. She emphasized how frustrated she got with the false reputation that the Mummers have for drinking excessively during the parade. “Mummers don’t drink during the parade! It’s the spectators,” she explained to me. She continued on to explain how upset she got about the way the larger public viewed the Mummers, “as if we’re trash.” Yet as I watch these three old men drink from a flask, as a teenager might do, I wonder if it is the really only the spectators who drink.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

Starting in 1882, newspaper articles shift from reporting about the nuisances of the New Year’s Shooters to the excitement of the New Year’s masquerades. In 1882, an article states “Thousands of people filled the streets in true holiday style” (“The New Year”). According to the article, a part of this true holiday style was the New Year’s Shooters, though the author is careful to explain that the Shooters no longer shoot their guns because of an ordinance against live

firearms on public highways (par. 2). The revelers, instead, “go to the expense of purchasing expensive and frequently very elegant costumes” (par. 2). By this time, the celebrations were starting to turn into elegant displays of financial and social propriety; yet the partiers were clearly still noted to be from the less refined areas of the city in South Philadelphia.

In 1884, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* continued to rave about the expense and elegance of the costumes, again specifically noting the lower-class economic background of the Shooters (“The Masquers”). Something had changed by that time, however, the New Year’s Shooters were starting to gain acceptance. Much of this acceptance involves the expense of their costumes, and the drastic change from the earlier more tawdry style, clearly referencing a common understanding that more money meant greater respectability. This acceptance continued through the 1880s and into the last decade of the 1800s. Instead of talking about the Mummies as out of control hoodlums, the newspaper articles completely change their tone in 1890, calling the Mummies “merry makers” and “revelers,” and emphasizing their fine clothing and refined behavior (“New Year’s Clubs”; “New Year Pageants”). Thus, these new permit rules parallel a growing association between the Mummies and upper class morals and behaviors; making a clear connection between the influence of money, the Mummies’ behavior, and class.

Although the celebrations were relatively calm and orderly, the memory of earlier rowdy shootings snuck into the celebrations toward the end of the 1800s. Every article on the second or third day of January each year reviewed that year’s events and often referenced the previously rowdy and out of control celebrations of the Mummies. For example, in 1888, the article explains, “There was almost an entire absence of that boisterous horseplay which is so distinguishing a feature” (“Merry Masqueraders”). Another article, published in 1884, claims, “Had masquerading been allowed to go on as lawlessly as it once threatened to, it would have become a nuisance in this city” (“The Masquers”). These articles served as a consistent reminder



that the revelers were once and would be again a horrible nuisance if not controlled via permits.

An additional control device came in the form of a new theme: that of the king (Hansberry 7-14).

January 1, 2008; 4:45pm: After a long day of strutting and dancing; dancing and strutting; running and waiting; waiting and laughing, I finally arrive at the Judge's Stand. One of the marshals makes sure I am in the right spot and reprimands the trio in front of me for not paying attention. In a moment of attempted control, she walks right up to me and yells, "what is the name of your costume?" I grimace because I do not want to reveal my somewhat problematic costume name. "African Queen" I say quietly. The woman smiles, says, "Of course, today, we're all kings and queens!" and walks away.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

Starting in the late 1880s and the early 1890s, the Mummers took on a new theme: the celebration of King Momus. Newspaper articles begin referring to the Mummers as kings in 1890s. In 1893, articles outline the royal celebrations and enumerate the clubs by name, many of whom carry some reference to royalty in their name. The Royal Italians and the Golden, Silver, and Bronze Crown clubs show their connection to a royal theme. Costumes turned into court jesters, kings, and queens and the parade took on the idea that anyone could be king for a day via the Mummers Parade ("All the Mummers").

Although the origins of this courtly theme are unclear, the beginning of the recorded newspaper history can clearly be traced back to the founding of the Golden Crown club in or before 1880.<sup>4</sup> No newspaper articles appear in local newspapers before 1880 that outline or even mention the existence of the Golden Crown Club, but in 1880, the group seems well established. An article published in January of 1880 outlines an incident in which a man from the groups was accidentally shot in the eye during a New Year's serenade outside of a South Philadelphia home ("Shot at a Serenade"). The group had previously been established because the article mentions them by name, but gives no other biographical information. Other articles appear over the next

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<sup>4</sup> To be clear, this history is not interested in finding an origin story. Instead, I seek to decode the writing of the history. When did this theme first appear and how might it intersect with the ways the Mummers use their history of class to understand their community?

two years, but they are all associated with other non-New Year's celebrations with which the Golden Crown Club is associated ("A Saint's Day"; "Departure of The Merritt Bay Club"). This theme, however, continues in all articles about the Mummers through to the present day. The theme clearly connects the changing parade to financial extravagance, upper class values, and therefore refined behavior.

"Brilliant and Amusing Pageantry Up the Town and Down the Town, With Great Crowds of Spectators. Clubs which made attractive displays—The Prize Winners" ("All the Mummers").

At the same time, another shift occurred: the introduction of financial prizes. When the Mummers began to be seen as revelers instead of hooligans, local saloons, and merchants started offering food and drink as a way to get Mummers to strut by their businesses ("Business Men on Parade"; "Merry Mummers in Gaudy Garb"; "In Political Circles"; Hansberry 8). At this time, however, the festivities lacked any kind of organization seen in today's parade ("The Merry Makers May Join Hands"). Mummers marched wherever it was most convenient, and wherever they could get the best food. In many ways, during the 1880s, the merchants competed for the Mummers' attention, buttressing the arguments that the Mummers were no longer viewed as a common nuisance and that money played an important part in the way the Mummers' community legitimized itself in Philadelphia. As a way to increase their chances of getting Mummers' business, the merchants began offering prizes other than food and drink (Hansberry 9-17).

In the late 1880s, legend has it that one group was so impressive that a merchant decided to award them \$25. The Clements Club, named after a wealthy businessman who funded the group, had broken off from another Mummer group in the summer of 1887. After working hard all year their costumes were so amazing that "the judges at McGowan's...awarded the club \$25

in cash” (Hansberry 14). According to Hansberry’s account, businesses began to award cash prizes at every following parade in order to attract Mummies to their neighborhoods.

Articles between 1887 and 1892 do not discuss financial prizes. By 1892, however, prize money seems to be commonplace in all reports. For example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states in an 1892 article, “The Frankfurt Avenue Improvement Project offered \$500 in prizes, divided into six portions” (“Merry Mummies in Gaudy Garb”). By 1892, newspaper articles support the notion that prize money was commonplace; however, these same newspaper articles also support the idea that the celebrations were still spread out over the entire area including the city and suburbs. That same 1892 article claims, “The Golden Crown swept all before them in Germantown, taking numerous prizes offered by the suburban residents to induce paraders to visit them” (par. 16). Therefore, the prizes appear to have stood as bribes to convince Mummies to parade in certain areas, thereby attracting business on an otherwise slow business day of New Year’s Day. The prize money took a turn from a bribe for good behavior to a bribe for mere presence, which supports the claim that the Mummies were considered relatively refined by that time.

Along with this increase in business came an increased risk, however, and the continued reminder that the Mummies of the past were dangerous folks. The city still knew the Mummies to be rowdy and potentially out of control revelers on at least some level and these constant reminders of that past buttressed the need for the Mummies to behave appropriately so that they could keep getting prize money. Two articles outline the schedule that Mummies followed: First, ring in the New Year at City Hall; celebrate by drinking for a few hours; eat breakfast; return to the parade area by five in the morning (“Merry Mummies”; “New Year’s Clubs”). The prizes had not made any serious changes in this crazy behavior, though all of the newspaper articles of the

time associate increased prize money with more orderly behavior (“Merry Mummies”; “The Merry Makers”; “All the Mummies”; “New Year's Clubs”)

Because the theme had changed to one of royalty and class and because of the merchants’ prizes, the city officials thought they had controlled the celebrations. In 1892, however, a supposed riot after the celebrations proved otherwise. According to Hansberry, even though the permit rule was still in place, many of the men simply registered as a new organization and then caused trouble, only to register under a different name the following year. Her history claims that the riots of 1892 confirmed that the city had to do something to control these celebrations (Hansberry 14-15).

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other newspapers tell a different story, however. The *Philadelphia Inquirer’s* article about the 1892 parade tells a story of happy celebrations and controlled revelry. The article claims, “In addition to the regular clubs, there mingled in the crowds of spectators curious little groups of independent paraders, some having really fine costumes and original designs. The boys in all sorts of weird costumes helped out the carnival with voice and presence” (“Merry Mummies in Gaudy Garb” par. 3). This article tells of no scandal, violence or upheaval; rather, it boasts of a controlled parade in which the Mummies strutted to the tune of prizes. Regardless, the way the history has been written emphasizes a contrast between the rowdy hooligans of the early parades and the refined Mummies of the post-prize money years.

In December of 1892, the idea that a unified parade would benefit the merchants of the city began to spread. On December 13, 1892, The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran an opinion piece that reiterated the idea that the Mummies should organize and parade in one single march (“The Merry Makers”). The article clearly argues that the businesses and the Mummies alike would benefit. Quoting a prominent Chestnut Street businessman, the article cites Mardi Gras

celebrations in New Orleans and Memphis as “a source of immense revenue to the trades, the merchants, large and small, bringing thousands of strangers from the surrounding country to the scene, with all the attending expenditure of money coincident with such occasion” (par. 2). The idea not only proposed the important local revenue increase but also a kind of financial control over the Mummers. This financial control was clearly associated with social control in the coming years.

In 1893, as the paragon of financial influence the *Philadelphia Inquirer* essentially bribed the Mummers to strut by the *Inquirer's* offices on New Year's Day for fairly substantial cash prizes, such as \$50. In order to get the prize money, the Mummers had to register for a permit and strut in front of the *Inquirer* offices. The *Inquirer* was, therefore, able to attract business, advertise, and construct a dynamic in which the *Inquirer* was responsible for taming the out of control Mummers via financial restitution.

The *Inquirer's* strategy was somewhat successful in 1893, with increasing success in the subsequent two years. In 1893, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported only on the clubs that passed in front of its building on Chestnut Street. For example, the article states, “The Mulligan comics brought up the rear of the club column” (“Twenty-Four Hours behind” par 4). Unlike in previous years, the 1893 article assumed only one parade, despite the fact that there were still numerous parade locations. One can see the beginning of a new common sense, to borrow from Gramsci, in these articles in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: A unified, financially dependant class of Mummers is best for the merchants, which is best for the city.

In the end of 1893 and the beginning of 1894, the *Inquirer* continued to shape a new understanding about the Mummers Parade—one that suggests that a unified, money-driven parade is the right thing for not only the Mummers but also the city as a whole. Although these articles were clear to list all advertised prizes throughout the city, they continued to emphasize

the large amounts of money offered by the *Inquirer* for groups that marched by the *Inquirer* building. Although a December 31, 1993 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* includes a subtitle of, “Some fine displays promised in various parts of the city” (“The Parade of New Years Clubs”), the text of the article places the most attention on the *Inquirer* building. The article reiterates the exact same argument from the year before—the Mummers will be under control and therefore a benefit to the city. Additionally, the article lists low amounts of prize money from other merchants, and emphasizes the *Inquirer*’s significantly larger sum of prize money. By only implying the superiority of the *Inquirer*’s prize money, the newspaper is able to begin the process of creating a new common sense for the Mummers—one that associates financial reward for particular behaviors.

August 16, 2007; 9:30pm: Dunkin shows me around the only partially working Mummers Museum. We stand in front of a huge screen and he flicks a button. Various routes on a map of Philadelphia light up with dates associated. “We used to march all that way! You think you could do that?” Dunkin asks. I tell him that I am not sure, but quickly focus on an early map from the 1800s. I ask him about it, and he says, “Well, there’s some history for you. You ask different people; you get different histories.” We move on, and I stay quiet about the fact that he never really answered my question: What were all those routes from the 1800s?

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

By the end of 1894, the stage had been set: the *Inquirer* building was the place to be. On December 30, 1894, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published an article claiming that nearly all the clubs would pass by the *Inquirer* Building. This article began the clear turn towards an understanding of the Mummers as a financially beneficial event for the city. The article reminded the readers that there are many important businesses by the *Inquirer* Building, and that a hotel, The Bingham House, would host “hundreds of guests from other sections of the state and country” (“New Year Pageants”). Although the article again cited other prizes, it was careful to juxtapose the impressive *Inquirer* cash prizes, such as \$100 for “the most handsomely costumed

club” (par. 2) with the other prizes, such as a \$20 cash prize from a business proprietor in South Philadelphia. The parade was quickly becoming organized. Money acted as the organizer.

Starting on January 1, 1895, the parade had been turned over to a celebration of King Momus; a celebration that promoted a refined and honorable class of Mummies. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* article on January 2, 1895 read “King Momus Ruled, All Made Merry: Market Street Was Made a Centre of Attraction—Winners of the Cash Prizes Offered by The Inquirer and the Bingham House- A Great New Day for New Years Shooters” (“King Momus Ruled”). The headline summed up the transformation of the parade from a local neighborhood celebration considered debaucherous to a city-wide attraction considered a financial goldmine. By concentrating on the economic hardship of the Mummies, as well as the financial desires of the city as a whole, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was able to transform the parade community and shape it into something that would benefit all.

The years following the 1895 parade continued with the same sort of rhetoric. The *Inquirer* emphasized the new honorable and controlled nature of the Mummies. Articles on the Mummies increased significantly after the 1895 parade. Instead of one or two articles per year, the average in the previous decade, the *Inquirer* started to run ten or more every year. The newspaper published opinion pieces and human interest articles, all of which shone a good light on the parade. All of this good press attracted officials in the Philadelphia government. They wanted a piece of this newly understood celebration in large part because of the *Inquirer’s* ability to shape the opinions of the citizens and transform the image of the parade participants (Hansberry 17). By December of 1900, the city set to take over the parade. The newly sanctioned parade would have committees of judges and would focus the gaze of the city on the refined and impressive Mummies (Hansberry 19).

After the first officially sanctioned parade, the Mummers changed from a group of hooligans to a somewhat respectable organization of men. An article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* supports this theory. The article is entitled, “Half a Century of Mummers: From a Rag-a-Muffin of 50 Years ago, the New Years Shooters of To-day Spend Thousands of Dollars to be King for a Day.” The article goes on to outline how the Mummers began in the Southwark district and “the neck,” a historically poor part of South Philly where the clubhouses now stand, but metamorphosized into a tradition full of respectable costuming requiring thousands of dollars. It ends, however, by connecting the Mummers to the city as a symbol of pride and honor, something that the Mummers have since tried to maintain for more than a century with decreasing success.

The increasing attention on the financial aspects of mumming successfully served the larger Philadelphia community in accepting the Mummers Parade as a legitimate cultural performance. In order to be allowed to parade and celebrate, the city needed to see the Mummers as a somewhat refined cultural celebration rather than a debauchorous, out-of-control group of hooligans. This change succeeded in its purpose for the rest of the city; however, for the Mummers, this change and acceptance came with a cost: an emphasis on the financial aspects of the parade and, therefore, away from their own socioeconomic roots. In shifting away from the grassroots performances that mocked the upper class of early days of the parade, the Mummers became reliant upon the financial support of the city, which was not always available. Two primary points in history illustrate the way this financial influence affected the Mummers’ understandings of their own community: World War I and the Great Depression.

“For 42 years this club has paraded without fail and neither rain nor war is going to stop it” (Hansberry 89).



The Mummies saw fifteen years of popularity. The parades went well, and prize money increased every year (Hansberry 79-85). Whereas prize money from the city was only \$1500 in 1901 (“Merry Mummies in Motley Garb”), by 1916, awards totaled over \$4500 (“Mummies Parade Awards”). In fact, after the success of the 1916 parade, the city started plans to increase the prize money, pointing to the impressive and refined social engagements for which the Mummies were now famous (“Mummies Prize Fund”). When World War I began, numbers of parade participants continued to soar. In 1917, some 15,000 paraders were reported to march in the parade (“Gorgeous Cohorts”). In 1918, the city increased the prize money to \$7500 (“Want \$7500”). The parade only seemed to be getting better. Within a span of only twenty years, the Mummies had gone from a group perceived to be dangerous and bad for the city, to one that the city planned to invest in further, even in times of war. More importantly, the Mummies had internalized this greater social influence by supporting popular opinion with social functions that mimicked upper class activities (Hansberry 81).

After World War I, however, the Mummies suffered their first crippling blow to their class identity as a community. After the increase in prize money for the 1918 parade, the city expected impressive turnout. Because of the war, however, the numbers were smaller than ever in 1918. Only 4500 Mummies marched that year, which caused the city to question their financial support of the parade. For nearly ten months leading up to the 1919 parade, the Mummies negotiated with the city (Hansberry 88). In the end, the city decided to continue their support of the Mummies, but it was too late. After the November decision, the Mummies claimed that they did not have enough time to prepare for the parade. They carefully stated that they would still celebrate, but would return to early celebration customs in South Philadelphia. Additionally, they promised to return to Broad Street the following year if awarded prize money from the city (“No Shooters' Show”).

Some groups still marched up Broad Street in 1919, but for small privately-funded prize money only. Therefore, by 1919, one can see an important internalization of this financial influence over the Mummers community's self-identity. Whereas the Mummers had once marched for the joy of the experience, the bulk of the Mummers by 1919 refused to march without prize money. Even though their official rhetoric claimed that they did not have enough time to prepare, local celebrations and parades continued, thereby contradicting that argument. The Mummers in 1919 were no longer a local community who paraded for fun and in order to mock the rich.

“No Prize Money! No Parade!”(Hansberry 151).

The Mummers saw another decade of success with increasing popularity in the city; however, the Great Depression hit them hard. In 1932, the Mummers pulled together in an attempt to help the city forget its woes. After the parade, however, they fought viciously over prize money. The news only got worse. For 1933, the city had no money to offer the Shooters. The Mummers battled over whether or not to march without prize money. George McClernand, an important leader in the Mummers Association, suggested that the Mummers parade in the Municipal Stadium. The plan would help raise money for prizes and keep the tradition going. Many mummers, however, disagreed with the suggestion and vowed to continue their tradition of strutting up Broad Street prize money or no (Hansberry 147). In the end, the Mummers split with some groups marching up Broad and others performing in the stadium. The result was not good. While many spectators still turned out on Broad Street, the stadium performers did not fare so well. Less than one hundred spectators went to the stadium, reinforcing the financial problems facing the nation as a whole and the Mummers in particular. According to Hansberry, “People barely had a dime for bread let alone a quarter for a parade ticket” (149). Thus began a seventy-

five year battle over the financial viability of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade during economically difficult times.

In 1934, the city again did not have money for the Mummers. Instead of repeating their mistake from the previous year, the Mummers decided to revert back to old traditions by celebrating locally in South Philadelphia. A December 24, 1933 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* claims, “The tentative arrangements are for the paraders to stop at the various clubhouses, where they will be presented with cakes and refreshments” (“Mummers Will Frolic”). In that way, the parade of 1934 mimicked the earliest years of the tradition. The Mummers celebrated locally and some businesses went back to the tradition of enticing groups to march by with cakes and other refreshments (Hansberry 151).

In 1935, despite the success of the previous year’s return to earlier tradition, the Mummers went back to Broad Street. With the Great Depression lifting, the city offered a small amount of prize money. This \$12,000 was enough to convince 12,000 Mummers to parade up Broad Street, returning the emphasis to that of financial gain and a refined Philadelphia pride. With the return to Broad Street and the reinstatement of prize money, came a specific turn back to the emphasis on money in the parade and the benefit of that money for the city as a whole. A January 1, 1935 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* remarks, “At least 50 former Mummers who now live in New York, Atlantic City and other points are now on their way here with original creations as well as friends and family to watch—clearly a good sign for the city of Philadelphia” (“12,000 to Parade”). The money had returned, and so had the connection to the cultural legitimacy of the Mummers. Because the Mummers had shifted their own understandings of their community to parallel this financially-driven reasoning, money remained a constant need to sustain the Mummers’ community. Although the parade could easily survive without money, as the 1934 parade clearly proved, the Mummers firmly understood their community via this lens of

financially-driven respectability. The Mummers had completely internalized the idea that money meant respectability.

“Mummers I don’t get it...It seems to be a group of bigoted persons that abuse the city for a day and cost the city way to much money. The city needs to pull all funding and let them fund themselves” (Suburban Guerilla).

As this genealogy outlines, the performance of class within the Mummers parade has changed over time. The parade began as a working-class celebration; a grassroots movement to claim space. The Mummers of those days were uncontrollable. These Mummers were a nuisance to the city of Philadelphia. In response, the merchants and the city tried to control the Mummers. Because of the changes in the culture of Philadelphia, especially those involving socioeconomics, the parade transformed into a way Mummers could become kings for a day. The Mummers absorbed the upper-class ideology of social control and propriety via the prizes offered from the merchants and later the city. The participants may have been poor in the past, and may still be poor, but they could be kings on New Year’s Day. The significant changing point in the performance of class in the parade occurred at this intersection of histories. The parade participants, coming from a working-class world, crossed the merchants and city officials, who used public discourse to promote an ideology of upper-class values in the Mummers. In this intersection, the Mummers Parade began to understand their community as a new class; one that required that the Mummers discard their working-class history in favor of this new ideology. In this way, the Mummers struggled to maintain their connection to their working-class background in a contemporary performance that emphasized upper-class financial performance.

We exchange glances for a few minutes; him in a UCLA sweatshirt; me in an Ojai, California tank top. It is close to 70 degrees out that January 6<sup>th</sup> in Philadelphia. Finally, I decide to use my newly acquired southern charm. “Did you go to UCLA?” I ask. “Nah. My folks live out der now,” he replies; his accent thick with South Philadelphia. I ask where and then tell him that I had gotten my Masters there. “Oh, sure! Show off! Show off!” he exclaims in response. I have never been so embarrassed by my education. I quickly backpedal, trying to

redirect the conversation to how I had worked in South Philly in my late twenties. “Yeah, I danced at a bar right down on Passyunk,” I say, making sure to pronounce the street name by blending all of the letters together.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

After the transition of the parade from a poor, hoodlum activity to a sanctioned performance of upper-class values, the parade eventually returned to a working-class activity in the minds of Philadelphia’s citizens. Contemporary understandings about class in the Mummers show this return to the earlier ideas about Mummers and class. All of the clubhouses are located in South Philadelphia in some of the cheapest neighborhoods in the city. More importantly, however, a largely unspoken understanding about the Mummers and class, even among the Mummers, is that they are a working-class group of people, and will not be infiltrated by the upper-class stratus. The juxtaposition between this understanding amongst the Mummers and the history that emphasizes an upper-class respectability creates conflict for the Mummers in their understandings of their own community.

Everyone I interviewed was careful to separate their class-related activities from mine. It seemed that the pure fact that I was in graduate school showed that I was not working class, could not have come from a working-class background, and would never be working class. Perhaps more importantly, however, my interviewees displayed a careful attention to the city’s understandings of the Mummers’ performance of class. For example, Palma said, “Those rich jerks up there think we’re a bunch of uneducated dummies, but we see right through them.” During my research period, she often commented upon how she felt used by the city. In running the Mummers Museum, she made room for disabled employees, interns from City College, and other local institutions at no additional cost to the city. With a limited budget and dwindling support from the city, Palma expressed frustration about her perception of the city’s view of the Mummers.

Dunkin also fought against the perception that the Mummers were poor and stupid while simultaneously maintaining a clear distinction between the rich in power and the Mummers. First, Dunkin used his accent strategically. He lives on the Mainline, a notoriously upper-class section of suburbs. He speaks with little to no Philadelphian accent in everyday conversation, but code switched as soon as we entered a group of Mummers. Second, he got angry when I asked about the TV deals the Mummers have, explaining that the TV stations make millions on the Mummers, but don't help them out at all financially. "They don't give a shit about all of the time and money we put into costumes. They want the parade to go, so they can make their money off all of our hard work," he explained when I asked him about possible additional funding for the parade.

Additionally, the financial success of the Fancy Brigades has caused a great deal of anger within the other Mummers groups. The Fancy Brigade Division, which is similar to the Fancy Division but with larger, more elaborate costumes and performances, broke off in 1995. The Brigades are now completely separate from the other three divisions, both politically and fiscally. The Brigades have their own television contract, and perform in the Convention Center. They sell tickets to their performances, and benefit both financially and popularly via this television contract. Many people only know of the Mummers by watching the Brigades on TV. The Brigades don't have to contend with weather issues, and they always get plenty of press. This financial and popular support behind the Fancy Brigades largely serves to reinforce the financial troubles of the rest of the Mummers.

These responses show the conflict within the Mummers' use of their history of class to make sense of their community. On one hand, the Mummers fight the perceptions of the greater community. They don't want to be seen as poor, stupid, or improper. On the other hand, the Mummers do everything in their power to maintain these perceptions, by alienating those from

the upper class, and communicating via in-group communication strategies. The Mummies allow just enough information out to elicit the desired response from the city, the citizens of Philadelphia, and the spectators.

The Mummies have benefitted greatly from the city sponsorship of the parade. The parade started as a small neighborhood celebration, and became a huge city-wide event within a couple of decades. The parade developed and has had millions of spectators in its heyday. However, as times have changed, so too have the popular opinions about the Mummies' viability in the city. Current views on the Mummies question the costs of the parade. Instead of placing the Mummies in a position of understanding and cooperation with the cultured Philadelphians, the financial costs associated with the parade seem to distance the two communities. For example, a November 2008 budget cut completely removed all of the prize money set aside for the Mummies. In response to a newspaper article about the cuts, one reader remarked, "thank god Nutter smartened up, the Mummer free ride is OVER, time to cancel this farce once and for all" (Lucey and Brennan) According to another article, "City officials tell Fox 29 News that they will ask for reimbursements for security and street cleaning at all non-city events, such as the Thanksgiving Parade and the Mummies Day Parade" (Kim). A combination of a changing socioeconomic world and the way the Mummies use their history to legitimize their community has set up a problematic situation for the Mummies in terms of class and the community in contemporary society.

The 2010 parade is set to have no financial support from the city government. Palma has expressed both anger and relief in response to this change. She claimed, "Maybe this is a blessing in disguise, because we'll finally be in control again." The Mummies have started pursuing other financing options such as fundraisers, advertising and other smaller financial

support packages (mummers.com). These independent supporters, the Mummers hope, will have a less controlling effect on the parade as a whole.

With this lack of financial support from the city, however, an additional control issue has come to the fore. The Mummers have used a secondary celebration on Two Street to come together as a community outside of the gaze of the non-Mummers on Broad Street. Dunkin claimed, “This is our celebration, where we can actually let loose and embrace our community.” The city, however, threatened to arrest anyone who participated in the Two Street celebration in the 2009 parade because the city did not have the budget for security and clean up of that celebration. The Mummers protested via numerous town hall style meetings and smaller legal meetings between the Mummers’ lawyers and the mayor. In the end, the Two Street celebration was saved via a small independent financial donation (mummers.com). The importance of this celebration to the community reveals the continued connection between the grassroots history of the parade and the connection to their historical understandings of their community as working class. These unofficial celebrations allow the Mummers to legitimize their community via the Broad Street parade, but uphold the community’s personal history of its class performance as well.

Therefore, the modern Mummers struggle to understand their community’s sense of class via a contradictory history of class. Although they attempt to maintain their legitimate status as a cultural product in the city via the official histories of the city’s adoption of the parade, the continued unstable economic conditions in the city and their desire to remain connected to their working-class roots cause conflict within the community. The city has started to view the Mummers as a burden more than an attraction. As a result, the official Mummers Parade is in jeopardy and the Mummers must try to find other ways to legitimize their community via class.



October 16, 2008; 11:30am: Palma reminds me, “We’re down there every night; if you want to come down.” I think to myself for a moment, trying to figure out where “there” is. It hits me suddenly: the clubhouse. They are down there every night making costumes. “I’ll be there,” I say, feeling a twinge of guilt that I haven’t helped out yet this year.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

## **CHAPTER FIVE STRUTTING INTO THE FUTURE**

### **Conclusion**

January 1, 2008; 4:35pm: I walk over to the flatbed truck. My body aches from the long day of strutting and dancing up Broad Street. When I get to the truck, I turn around and slowly back up to the side of the flatbed. Two men from our parade association come over, lift my back-piece out of my harness and place it in one of the racks on the truck. I thank them and walk toward the waiting bus. Now that the back-piece has been removed, I can feel every inch of my bruised and battered body. I feel muscles that have previous gone unnoticed. I pass a few men on the way to the bus, and silently thank the world for the rule that all women and children return to the clubhouse on the bus instead of having to carry all the costumes back, as the men do.

– Excerpt from author’s field notes

The purpose of this study has been to look at the Philadelphia Mummers Parade as a cultural performance. By using Richard Schechner’s definition of performance, “restored behavior,” I have analyzed how the parade community restores its histories in order to make sense of its community. In exploring three genealogies of community in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade —those of race, gender, and class—I have argued that the contemporary parade community legitimizes itself, often unconsciously, with these histories. This conclusion narrows in on the ways these three sets of histories intersect, and the implications of the study for both the Mummers Parade community and Performance Studies. In this chapter, I briefly revisit the arguments made in the preceding chapters, and then turn to the following discussion about the larger implications of these arguments. The Mummers use a sort of tacit knowledge in order to maintain the boundaries of their community. This tacit knowledge is supported by the primary location of the history in the repertoire or incorporating gestures. Because the history is outside of the grasp of most Philadelphians via its location in the interaction between the archive and the repertoire, and because the Mummers rely on such tacit knowledge, the parade community

continues its earlier alienation from the larger Philadelphian community contemporarily. And lastly, the Mummies' use of history to make sense of their community shows us ideas for future research in the ways communities use histories and implications of future research about these ideas in the field of Performance Studies.

In Chapter Two, I juggled the problematic issues of race and community through an analysis of the history of the unofficial theme song: "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers." Instead of apologizing for racisms of the past and present, I strove to situate these problems in a discussion about how this racism plays into the Mummies' performance of community. In resisting the desire to make sweeping judgments about the problems of minstrelsy in the parade, I found that the Mummies tell the history of race in the parade in specific ways so as to emphasize their own contemporary cultural legitimacy within the larger Philadelphian community. The Mummies strategically restore minstrelsy's use of blackface performance to create whiteness in communities once otherwise known as ethnic minorities, in order to stake a claim in the cultural world of Philadelphia. By restoring these performances, however, the Mummies restore the problematic history that comes with minstrelsy and, thereby, also restore racism into the city's view of the Mummies' contemporary community.

In Chapter Three, I researched a disappearing archive on gender and community within the parade. I came up with as many questions as answers as I attempted to authenticate Laura Lee's existence and the implications of her supposed performance in the 1929 parade. Instead, I found a paradox of gender performance that employed an attempt at a passing female impersonation on one side and the banning of women from participating on the other. Rather than trying to solve this paradox with one truth, I allowed the paradox to show another way the Mummies community attempts to use its history to claim space in modern day Philadelphia via

propriety. The Mummies historically negotiated this paradox by emphasizing their own control over their community via an extensive use of propriety.

The genealogy on gender expanded on that of race by reminding me of the difficulty of the task at hand. In Chapter Three, I realized that no singular answers were available. Instead, my job was to mold the paradoxes into complex understandings of the way communities perform history in order to make sense of their worlds. As Peggy Phelan notes:

Since the given to be seen is always exclusionary, subject positions must attend to the affective consequences of the failure to be recognized. This failure implies that subject positions are always related to the negative, to that which cannot be or is not developed within the visual field. Therefore, subject positions are always partial. (90)

Although Phelan specifically deals with the visual in film here, researching the Mummies Parade results in similar affects. In fleshing out the historicities of the Philadelphia Mummies Parade, partial answers abound. That which is seen, heard, felt and performed always implies an invisible other. In the case of the genealogy of gender, I found that the Mummies use the invisibility of biological women in the parade in order to support their own masculinity. This paradox, however, also brought forth a difficulty in the contemporary parade in balancing the changing rules of gender with the need to maintain a sense of propriety.

In Chapter Four, my research turned toward socioeconomic class in the parade, during a time when economic support of the parade is in jeopardy. The genealogical method I employed helped me to articulate the changing way the Mummies performed socioeconomic class in the past, and the current implications of those performances. By transitioning from a grassroots performance celebration to one in which prize money took over, the Mummies set the stage for the contemporary problems with governmental support. Thus, the final chapter of analysis in this

work argued that the Mummers attempted to distance themselves from their working-class past by using money as a focus for the legitimacy of the parade. Because the Mummers still identify as working class, however, the parade community struggles to negotiate their commitment to their working-class background with their need for acceptance contemporarily.

By reflecting upon the performances of race, gender, and class as separate performances in separate chapters, I have begun the process of making sense of the parade. In this conclusion, however, I deal with these three genealogies as overlapping and intersecting performances. To deal with the ways these identity categories intersect and communicate, however, is a difficult task. Hyphens abound as I place class next to race and race next to gender. As Jennifer De Vere Brody argues, “[The hyphen] is a sign that both compels and repels: it is not a fixed point; but rather, a shifting positionality—a continually collapsing structure. As the joint, it is the site of intersection and therefore the weakest link of any construction” (149). By placing the three genealogies in conversation, I use the unstable connections and frenetic links of race, gender, and class to work with the trickster of history. Thus, this conclusion reinforces the affects of these identity categories on the parade community, while acknowledging the tenuous nature of their connections. By placing the three identities in conversation here, I hope to mitigate some of the limitations of the chosen subject matter and later point to the significance of this study for future work. Therefore, I look to how these particular identities in the parade community emphasize a strategic balance between an open and a tacit community through time.

The Philadelphia Mummers Parade community relates to the aforementioned histories through restored behavior, at least tacitly. In other words, the members of the Mummers community unconsciously use previous performances, both aesthetic and everyday, as the basis upon which to behave in the present moment. In doing so, the Mummers restore historical acts over and over through time. This repetition creates a system of knowledge and understanding.

Much in the way Butler refers to gender as a “stylized repetition of acts” (179), the Mummies use historical repetition to make sense of their community contemporarily. In that way, the Mummies know who they are as a community via this performance of history; however, the knowledge is largely tacit— implied through the repetition of history *within* the community— and therefore specific to members of the community and tenuous in terms of its ability to perform the desired effect. Performance in the Philadelphia Mummies Parade is therefore a production of tacit knowledge.

When considering knowledge, one must recognize that the term itself is loaded with connotation and implications. Foucault cautions that knowledge is not a formal structure. He suggests that “It is not a fundamental philosophical choice; it is rather the existence of rules of formation for all its concepts (however scattered they may be)” (“Politics and the Study of Discourse” 54). Indeed, for Foucault, and for the work of this dissertation, knowledge is a vital aspect of discourse and therefore epistemology. So, how do we know what we know we know? In the Philadelphia Mummies Parade, knowledge becomes a key defining feature of the community because discourse on the various histories remains partial and incomplete. Instead, it is the production of this discourse, or the historicity, that keeps the Mummies community in tact. They strategically use the performance of history to make sense of their community.

The role of knowledge has performed a vital component in every corner of this study. Like the feeling of my body when my back-piece was removed, knowledge, discourse and truth crept into muscles I did not know I had. There are numerous examples of the performance of knowledge outlined in previous chapters: The creation and continued performance of problematic racial performances; the question of a passable female impersonation in comparison to subversive female performances; the spread and restriction of knowledge via the commoditization of the parade; and the ways in which the community understands race, gender,

and class in its history. All of these situations carry the common theme of tacit knowledge that is repeated and restored through time and space creating a performance of a history contingent upon secrecy and invisibility.

In researching the various histories of the parade, I repeatedly ran into walls or off cliffs. The archive is incomplete. Borrowing from Connerton, the performance of history in the Philadelphia Mummers Parade faces a problem with the issues of incorporating and inscribing practices. On one hand, incorporating practices involve messages that are imparted “by means of [the sender’s] own current bodily activity” (72). These messages are temporally limited to the moment during which the message is imparted. Inscribing practices, on the other hand, are practices that “trap and hold information” (73). Although inscribing and incorporating practices are not mutually exclusive (inscribing practices can contain incorporating practices), Connerton insists that his classification is a heuristic device. In other words, this set of categories can help make sense of the historical body and how it transmits history, despite the inability of the two categories to cleanly line up. In sum, Connerton describes incorporating practices as relatively informal, or less formal than religious ceremonies or rites. Within these less formal incorporating practices, however, one must consider the implicit formalities of propriety. Communities set up tacit rules for behavior, and these rules are absorbed into the incorporating practices. Thus, the historicity of the Mummers requires a balance of incorporating practices in the present performance of the parade via restored behaviors of the history, and inscribing practices in archival or other historical records. Within this combination, pieces of the inscribed history are missing, so I (along with the rest of the non-Mummer community) am left trying to interpret incorporating practices for some understanding of the performance of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. In that way, the Mummers themselves are in control of who gets what information.

To use other terms, knowledge in the Mummers Parade is contained in many ways in what Taylor labels the repertoire. Although the Mummers privilege the repertoire, the archive is neither without significance nor totally separate from the repertoire in this study. As Taylor explains, the archive is similarly mediated via a culture, but how it is mediated differs from that of the repertoire (19). By selecting, maintaining, and classifying the archive, the Mummers influence the knowledge about their community. Indeed, at many points in this study, the repertoire's affect on the archive caused me the most trouble. Sometimes I could not find the information I needed. Other times the information I found contradicted other information I had found. Most often, however, the Mummers or other people in charge of archival texts used a type of repertoire-based performance to affect my archival access. I explicate the problems of understanding this community because of this melding of the archive and the repertoire via two examples in order to connect this study back to the importance of the interaction between the archive and the repertoire.

As I explain in Chapter Three, evidence about Laura Lee's existence was minimal. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania held one record related to her work. This item was a pamphlet on which there were notes assumed to be written by Laura Lee. Following the Society's retrieval system, I filled out a call sheet, handed it to a librarian, and then returned to my assigned seat for the half-hour wait. As I waited, I noticed the librarian exit the restricted area and retrieve a book out of the public access stacks. I assumed she was working with another researcher, because the item I had requested was very clearly restricted. The librarian soon returned with the public access book and handed it to me. I looked through the item, which held a similar title to the item I had requested, but was not the same item. I then referenced the call numbers and quickly realized that I had been given the wrong item.



I approached the librarian and explained the problem. She called her boss, and said she would try to find the correct item. Thirty minutes later, I received another item. This second item had a similar call number to that of the requested item but was still not the correct item. I returned for a third time to the librarian. Her patience had apparently run out. She snapped at me and aggressively informed me that she didn't know what my problem was. I calmly attempted to explain the confusion, and once again asked for the specific call number I had requested. "Well, the first thing I brought you had the correct title, so I don't know what the problem is," she retorted. Another librarian soon intervened and went to look for the correct item.

After another thirty minutes, the second librarian returned empty-handed. He explained that he had no idea where the item was and inquired about my research. I explained that I was trying to get more information about Laura Lee, a woman who had supposedly worked as a reporter in the 1930s. I outlined my research thus far, and he responded, "Well, that seems like enough to say she did exist. I'm not really sure what else you need to prove that." I nodded and thanked the librarians for their time. This information supposedly safely contained within the archive was not accessible to me because of a repertoire-based performance of the archive.

The information eluded me not only with Laura Lee, but also at numerous other points in my research. My ability to understand the histories of the Mummies was limited by the interaction between the archive and the repertoire. I had to question repeatedly if it was that I could not find the information or if the information just did not exist. Was it that I was not looking in the right place or had the event not happened? Had the event not happened or were certain people trying to cover it up? Thus, I have tried to show my tools along the way, ever reminding myself and my reader that history is incomplete and partial, messy and tricky. In moving from the physical space of the Mummies' performances to the object spaces of the archives and eventually to the bodily spaces of the repertoire, I must balance the presence and

absence of many bodies: human corporeal bodies, both present and past; newspaper articles; archives; discourses; and institutions. As Phelan claims, “Performance’s being . . . becomes itself through disappearance” (146). In that way, the ability of the repertoire to disappear information from the archive is a vital aspect of the doing of this history.

After all, I am not the only one who has done or is doing a history of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade. Another example of the problem of the archive involves one of my most important sources: Suzanne Hansberry’s book *Along Their Merry Way*. This text outlines the first fifty years of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade, starting before the parade was officially adopted by the city. The text is a narrative, and perhaps a fine example of a performance of history. The text performs. Narratives, facts, and photos adorn its more than 200 pages as it tries to record this dying history. The one thing the text lacks is a bibliography or any form of references. Numerous times in my research at the Mummers Museum, Palma Lucas suggested that I meet the author, but on every planned occasion, something happened. When I asked Palma informed me repeatedly that the information in the book was based upon information Hansberry found in the Mummers’ archives. She assured me repeatedly that Hansberry’s text was accurate; however, every time I picked up that book, I wondered if it was real. What if I used this book extensively and every bit of it was fake?

The question of truth in this study is an important one. Information is missing and perhaps inaccurate through both the archival research and the repertoire. The Mummers use this absence and the aforementioned tacit knowledge strategically. Hansberry claims that the Mummers arose during a time in which the government lacked any social or humanitarian aid groups, so the Mummers and other similar groups functioned in that respect. Much like secret societies such as the Masons, the IORM, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias, the Mummers offered social and economic support for their members via the community functions (Hansberry

8). Although the Mummers clearly functioned in this way as a supportive community, they also used the tacit nature of their activities to their advantage. In so doing, the Mummers could control what information the public had access to and therefore how the public saw the parade community. This tacit knowledge has continued forth to today, despite the popularity and public nature of the parade itself.

Thus, the knowledge about this community is in large part contained in the interaction between the repertoire and the archive or the incorporating gestures and inscribing gestures. Taylor explains that “the repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being part of the transmission” (20). By keeping the knowledge tacit or within the present-moment performance, the Mummers require people to be present for the production of this knowledge. The only people who are present for the process of making this knowledge are those from within the community. Therefore, the Mummers believe, at least unconsciously, that they are able to maintain the boundaries of their community by controlling the production of knowledge about said community. This dynamic leads to problems within the repertoire and the repertoire-based aspects of the archive.

When I started to do preliminary research on the Mummers, I attempted to contact numerous groups. In fact, I emailed or called every single group for which I could find contact information. Only one group responded: the Golden Sunrise New Year’s Association. Even once they had agreed to let me work with them, the captains and people in charge were hesitant to reveal any information. The founder of the group, John Lucas, retorted quickly when he first met me with, “what are you going to fuckin’ interview me now?” Once I had gained the Mummers’ trust, however, I gained a great deal of information, and other groups attempted to steal me away. When at a beef and beer fundraiser for another group, Hog Island New Year’s Association, the various members and captains tried to convince me to switch groups. I maintained my sense of

commitment to Golden Sunrise, but was ever-aware of the way the groups used tacit knowledge to their advantage. Because I had been accepted into the community, the tacit knowledge was increasingly available to me.

In this way, the Philadelphia Mummers Parade community is formed, defined and maintained through the extensive use of tacit knowledge. By keeping the histories and social rules unwritten and therefore accessible only to certain people, it might seem that the boundaries of who belongs inside and outside the community are clearer. In reality, however, the community boundaries are even further blurred and frenetic by this secrecy, causing the community itself to be constantly redefined in history through the use of this tacit knowledge. The redefinition within the community, however, contradicts the Mummers' attempts to maintain a secure standing in the larger city community. Therefore, this tacit performance of community results in a potentially negative view of the Mummers from the perspective of the larger community. Even though the Mummers are very friendly and open to other members of the community, the average Philadelphia citizen perceives them to be secretive and exclusive. In the end, reality is less important than this perception. The communication is such that the relationship between the city and the Mummers is one based on the perception of struggle and conflict. This struggle and conflict has thus been brought forth from history via the use of tacit knowledge housed in the Mummers' interaction between the archive and the repertoire.

The way the Mummers use their history to legitimize the parade community is a vital aspect of the Mummers' contemporary standing in the city of Philadelphia. By use of the aforementioned struggles for legitimacy in terms of racial performance, propriety in terms of gender performance, and commoditization in terms of class performance, the Mummers communicate clear community boundaries between the Mummer-friendly citizens of Philadelphia on one side and the rest of the community on the other side. Because of this us/them

communication through history, the larger community of Philadelphia perceives the Mummers to be exclusive and secretive. This inside/outside dynamic is how the Mummers seek to set the boundaries of their community. I argue that this struggle, however, is what causes the continued alienation of the Mummers from the city of Philadelphia. By unconsciously attempting to restore their earlier performances to point to and claim cultural legitimacy, the Mummers are restoring problematic histories. The parade community restores the racism from minstrelsy, the sexism from the “no women in the line of march” rule, and the struggles with their working class background. By restoring these problematic histories, the Mummers hurt their standing in the larger community of Philadelphia. Despite every spoken desire to be accepted as a legitimate cultural performance in Philadelphia, the Mummers’ relationship to their history reveals a continued difficulty in balancing the use of history to make sense of their community.

This struggle to balance the stuff of the archive or inscribed gestures and the stuff of the repertoire or incorporated gestures locates the important future work and significances of this study for the field of Performance Studies. Indeed, this dissertation could continue with numerous additional chapters on the histories of sexuality, the body, tourism, and the intersections therein. While I have not dealt explicitly with those subjects in this dissertation, the significance of these subjects help explicate the need for continued and expanded work on the ideas of this study.

Future work could and should expand on the identity categories and types of performance that I deal with here. First, a chapter on sexuality could help mitigate some of the conflation of gender and sexuality that the larger public uses to understand the Mummers, which I discuss briefly in Chapter Three. Gay and lesbian Mummers not only exist but have played a large role in the parade community at times. The founder of the Philadelphia Gay and Lesbian Center, William Way, was a Mummer and the center contains a large archive of not only his work with

the Mummies but also that of other gay and lesbian Mummies (waygay.org). Interestingly, though, the Mummies do not often discuss issues of sexuality. Instead, these performances are located primarily in the repertoire for the parade community itself. There is an assumption from within the Mummies community that most members are heterosexual. In fact, one of the most popular and important Mummies, Fran, is openly gay, but people rarely talk about it. I found out he was gay when another Mummer about my age leaned over to me at the aforementioned beef and beer and said, “he’s ya know . . . funny.” The Mummies’ girlfriend then leaned over to me and said, “he’s in the family.” I recognized that code to mean that Fran is gay. I also assumed that the woman telling me about Fran must also have experience in the gay and lesbian world, because of her knowledge of that phrase. In response, I said, “me too.” The interaction resulted in a long conversation about the various issues of sexual identity and the Mummies community. The Mummies do little to discuss the importance and presence of gay and lesbian Mummies in large part because outside opinion remains that all Mummies are gay. This is an opinion that many Mummies would like to remove. Therefore, the influence of gay and lesbian Mummies through history would be an important thread to follow in future research.

Additionally, the physical performance of the Mummies points to significant ways the Mummies make sense of their community through history. The captains’ costumes made a drastic style change sometime between 1957 and 1961. Although I have not been able to pin down the exact date or reason for the change, at some point in those years the captain’s costumes changed from a massive cape requiring hundreds of page-boys to hold it up to the back-piece costumes popular today. Palma Lucas explained that in the 1980s John Lucas tried to bring back this cape costume by restoring the extravagant and exciting unfolding of the cape in the front of the judges’ stand. John’s costume lost, so the association assumed that the judges did not like it, and it was therefore a lost art. Regardless, the Mummies’ costumes are huge contraptions that

turn the Mummies' into machines. Expanding on how, why, and when this costume changed occurred as well as the use of these mechanistic costumes and how the Mummies use that to make sense of their own community would be an important area of future research to connect to theories of the body and performance.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, there is a significant connection to Tourism Studies within the pages of this document and therefore waiting for future research. The Mummies are a particularly good example of the theories of authenticity and commoditization found in theories of tourism. Through the history of the theories on tourism, many theorists discuss the issues of authenticity and commoditization. Though I do not attempt to give a thorough review of these theories here, I outline a few relevant theories in order to point to important areas for future research and significance in the field of Performance Studies.

Daniel Boorstin, a historian, argued in his 1967 text, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America* that tourism was just one facet of modern culture that condemned people to stupidity. Mass tourism had replaced the more distinct experience of travelling in which the elite paid greatly both in money and discomfort for the opportunity to transform. With this replacement, mass tourism took the financial hardship out of travel, not to mention most of the physical discomfort. Tourists simply paid for the illusion of reality they most wanted to accept. In this financial transaction, tourism commodified experience and turned it into something people think they can buy and sell at a low price. In many ways, this kind of buying and selling of pseudo-culture is wholly present in the Mummies parade. When the *Inquirer* took over the parade, the parade changed into something that might be bought and sold and followed an authenticity that had little to do with the earlier form of the parade.

In relationship to commoditization and tourism, in *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, MacCannell sets up a sort hierarchy of people based on their socioeconomic class,

as related to Marx's theories of alienation. MacCannell believed that primitive or non-modern "do not suffer from anxiety about the authenticity of their lives" (93). Modernity imposes a separation of life into what he called "front" and "back" regions, leading to this constant quest for authenticity in modern, more economically vibrant cultures. The front stage is the public part of life that we show to others. The backstage is the private part of life that we show only to our intimate associates and is inaccessible to outsiders. MacCannell assumed that tourists gullibly accept any stage as authentic as long as it agrees with their own preconceptions. In this view tourists are easily fooled. They believe that authenticity lies only in the Other and that the Other must be therefore authentic. In particular, this Other can be seen most clearly and often in cultures that are socially and economically depressed. The Mummies are in many ways a good example of this willing acceptance of the staged other. With time, the city started to view the Mummies as an Other that must contain some kind of authenticity.

These theories, however, focus on a social-dramaturgical approach to Tourism Studies and tourist events, in which the tourist is not fully active in the event. A performance perspective on tourism, however, claims that when we travel to a site, we are active participants in viewing the site. For example Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett focuses on the embodied practice of tourism in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. She stresses authentication over authenticity. From a social dramaturgical perspective, the tourist would mindlessly accept a front stage view or constantly search for the backstage authentic. From the performance perspective, however, the site shows the holes in the performance, allowing the tourist to remain an active participant in his or her interpolative experience.

The Mummies strut between and through these different theories of tourism. Historically speaking, the Mummies have been commodified via the prize money and city sponsorship. The Mummies had contracts with the city until this year, which seriously affected the clubs



performances and caused the performances to follow the presumed desires of the city. Similarly, all of the commercial attention surrounding the Mummers supports the claim that the audiences are constantly searching for the authentic Mummer. Yet, to argue that the spectators, be they tourists or locals, are without any responsibility and are simply stupidly accepting everything placed before them is a naïve theory at best. On the contrary, I suggest that the Mummers have worked with the tourists, mostly unconsciously, to create the current relationship in the city that is the contemporary Mummers Parade. This relationship is full of problems and by researching it historically and contemporarily we could expand our current understandings of the function of history in the tourism of communities.

Although the research on tourism is outside of the scope of this study, it could indeed help propel this study further into the future of Performance Studies. The Mummers bridge these multiple theories—history, identity, community, and tourism. In connecting these different perspectives, one can see room for future research on the ways communities relate to identity, the ways communities use their histories to make sense of themselves, and the ways parade communities function as tourism sites via this use of restored history.

Thus, this study points to an unfilled hole in the field of Performance Studies that combines issues of identity performance with theories of community and the performance of history. Although many studies deal with these issues separately, few have combined the way that communities use the histories of specific identities in order to make sense of themselves. Additionally, by looking beyond the internal functioning of the community itself to the larger community surrounding it (in this case the city of Philadelphia) we can look to the larger implications of the community performance of history as a form of authentication in Tourism Studies. Because each and every one of us claims membership in one or more communities with one or more identities, this sort of community authentication abounds. In combination with the

emerging areas of inquiry in Performance Studies of the performance of history and Tourism Studies, the permutations of future study are endless. Thus, I return to Pollock's call to invite "the trickster in history onto the stage of history—and challenges us to entertain him for a while" (20). Indeed, with future research, Performance Studies can better understand the way people and communities, cities and tourists, individuals and groups restore their histories with implications of just as many permutations therein.

January 1, 2009; 9:45am: I exit the subway car and make my way up the stairs. Music floats through the vents in the subway station. "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers" plays softly while the noise of the subway car roaring away takes over acoustically. I step slowly up the final staircase, taking in the quiet melody. Step. Step. Step. The music gets louder as I exit the subway station to a view of the preparing performers getting ready to strut up Broad Street for the 2009 Philadelphia Mummers Parade.

– Excerpt from author's field notes

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## VITA

Corey Leighton was born on July 5, 1977, in Detroit, Michigan. Growing up in the Philadelphia area, she had the opportunity to see the Mummers Parade on TV from a young age and in person starting at the age of 18. These early interactions with the Mummers ignited an interest that would later lead to her dissertation study. In 1995, she graduated from Radnor High School in Radnor, Pennsylvania. She initially went to college for fashion design at the Art Institute of Philadelphia, and then the Academy of Art in San Francisco. In 1998, she transferred to a theatre program at San Francisco State University. At SFSU, Corey took her first upper division communication studies course called “Queer Theory and Communication.” She immediately fell in love with the field and began pursuing graduate study in communication studies. After graduation, she spent some time travelling, and then returned to California for her master’s study at California State University, Los Angeles. Corey moved to Louisiana, sight unseen, to pursue her doctoral study. She moved back to the Philadelphia area to finish her dissertation and to continue to expand her teaching repertoire at Villanova and Rowan Universities. To date, she has performed in numerous settings, including showcases, departmental performances, and fundraisers; and has taught across the communication discipline, always striving to expand her pedagogy. Future goals include performing at womyn’s festivals and around the world, teaching, writing, volunteering, spending time with her biological and chosen families around the world, travelling extensively, and relaxing via cartwheels on the beach in retirement.