The book *Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 274 pp.), by Jill Lane, is an audacious and extraordinary analysis of how blackface *bufo* theater in nineteenth-century, colonial Cuba represented a stage upon which Cubans—while in blackface—could imagine and play out their Cubanness and, with it, their desire for unfettered independence from Spain and its dominant culture. With the possible exception of W.T. Lhamon, Jr.’s book *Raising Cain. Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), most (not all) other U.S. and Cuban books that examine the phenomenon of blackface performance (minstrel shows or *bufo*) are often so limited by their condemnation of the explicit racism of this white theatrical form that they do not permit any deeper or more enriching exploration. Such is not the case with *Blackface Cuba*, which intrepidly and reasonably submits that through performance Cuban blackface farce (*bufo*) was, in fact, an oppositional space and imagined reality that despite its explicit racism and colonial mimicry challenged the island’s colonial conceptualization and reality. Lane problematizes any possible uncomplicated criticism of this genre by citing, for example, the extremely important play “La mulata de rango” [The Ranked Mulata], José María Quintana’s 1891 work that “dramatizes the notion of race as performance…”(199). The play made a timely and audacious plea for racial equality at a time when Cuban independence depended almost entirely on the full participation of its blacks, who had only recently (1886) achieved total emancipation, in the struggle for freedom. It came in the form of a (drunken) white father who attempts to persuade his *mulata* daughter, Julia, to remember her obligation to her and her mother’s people:

**Manuelillo:** “You, as a *mulata*, as the daughter of a black woman…favor your own kind; be a friend to the blacks.”

**Julia:** “I love them all well.

**Manuelillo:** And so you do right by your conscience! They are your brothers; until yes-
The persona of the negrito, who since his inception in 1840 undergoes a transformation from a bozal black (one who is a native of Africa and can hardly speak Spanish), to a catedrático black (who is more urban and uses many malapropisms when attempting to sound intelligent [white]) and then beyond, serves, with bufo's many other stock characters—the mulata, the gallego (Spaniard), the chino (Chinese man) and the white Cuban vivo (the negrito's street smart, white Cuban counterpart)—to define Cuba and Cubans as entirely different from Spain and Spaniards (or Africans). As Lane so succinctly puts it, bufo plays, with their cast of characters, allow one to see 'difference'in Cuba "in terms of the colony's 'others'—both its internal others (Africans, slaves, black Cubans) and its external other (Spain and Spaniards as a colonizing power)" (226). Cultural and social (and even political) independence from Spain required that white Cubans be able to see themselves as different from the citizens of their madre patria—an important vehicle for this was performance and blackface theater.

The intention of Cuban playwrights between 1840 and 1895, of writers such as Bartolomé José Crespo y Borbón, José Socorro de León, Juan José Guerrero, Antonio Enrique de Zafra, Francisco Fernández, Alfredo Toroella, Ignacio Saragacha, Pedro N. Pequeño, Raimundo Cabrera y Bosch, José María de Quintana, Miguel Salas, Manuel Mellado y Montaña, José Tamayo, Ramón Moralez Álvarez, Alfredo Piloto and Vicente Pardo y Suárez, who wrote bufo pieces in which their (white) players had to black up to represent the negrito (the principal character), was not only to criticize colonial mores and domination, by 'misusing' the image of black Cubans, but also to problematize the very
concept of Cuban whiteness and nationality. By using racial and racialized stereotypes of all possible Cuban citizens, these writers were pointing towards a new social and historical context that went beyond the original Spanish stereotype of Cubans, white or black. In Cuban _bufo_ theater, it is the street smart _negrito_ who outsmarts everyone else, particularly Spaniards; Afro-Cuban music that permanently changes ‘Spanish’ music; and, Cuban Spanish (with its African inflections and vocabulary), as spoken by both black and white Cubans, that beats out Peninsular (colonial) Spanish. Lane explains that this:

“[abuse] of proper Spanish produced a defamiliarizing operation…. [The] distortions of the so-called ‘African’ make audible a ‘new’ or an ‘other’ Spanish—one that was later recuperated as, precisely, ‘Cuban’…. [This] abuse of Spanish was so fully enjoyed by its white Cuban audience that countless of [these] ‘African’ aberrations were subsequently embraced and introduced into a wider vernacular. Today…they are commonly known as ‘cubanisms.’”

Lane avails herself of Cuban historians and critics—Salvador Bueno, José Juan Arrom, Raimiro Cabrera, Francisco Ortiz and Federico Villoch, for example—and recent, internationally known theorists like Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, Samuel Feijoo, Rine Leal, Doris Sommer, Diana Taylor and Slavoj Zizek to contextualize her understanding of the role _bufo_ played in Cuban nationalism and independence. Using Martí’s essay “Nuestra América” as a point of departure, she examines and summarizes an extraordinary number of _bufo_ plays and characters, many of them virtually unknown to contemporary theater historians, to argue that blackface plays provided a discursive space in which white Cubans could envision what Anderson would later call “the imagined community.”

The causes for the sociopolitical distress that triggered the rise of _bufo_ in colonial Cuba may have been addressed by eventual Cuban independence, but later tensions stemming from a retracted neo-colonial relationship with the U.S. (and capitalism), socialism both during and after its engagement with the Soviet Union, and subsequent economic and social woes, continue to inspire new, modified versions of _bufo_ theater in Cuba. _Blackface Cuba_’s analysis may end with the last decades of the nineteenth century in Cuba, but its critical approach has much to offer anyone interested in twentieth- and twenty-first century Cuban popular theater on the island or in exile, particularly in Miami. The exile community of Miami relies on _bufo_-style theater to express its discontent with the post-1959 Cuban situation and its own difficulties. Lane’s _Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895_ offers an impressive historical and cultural analysis of the role _bufo_ theater played in nineteenth-century Cuba and an excellent theoretical framework with which to examine twentieth-century _bufo_ theater in Cuba, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century émigré communities, and in post-1959 exile communities in the U.S.
Blackface, which dates back to as early as the Middle Ages, is the theater performance practice of wearing soot, cosmetics, paint, or burnt cork to blacken the face. Semantic Scholar extracted view of "Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895 (review)" by R. Moore. Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895 (review), @article{Moore2006BlackfaceC1, title={Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895 (review)}, author={R. Moore}, journal={Latin American Music Review}, year={2006}, volume={27}, pages={108 - 112} }. R. Moore. Published 2006. Jill Lane Blackface Cuba 1968â€”1998, Chapter 2. Assumed tobe the offspring of a white Spnith man and an enaved African woman, sheâ€œodie an origin tale of Ca colania history, often sanding in fo the very idea of eral identity. er mesa offered an ambivalent vision of Cuba, standing athe threshold of at lest to posible futures onthe one hand â€œhe promised progressive â€œwhiteningâ€ of Cubs her unsurpassed beauty.