

1821. Africans

"Africans," *National Advocate*, August 3, 1821. Source: D. Gellman and D. Quigley, ed. (2003). *Jim Crow New York, A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship 1777-1877*. NY: New York University Press, 87-89.

Africans—People of colour generally are very imitative, quick in their conceptions and rapid in execution; but it is in the lighter pursuits requiring no intensity of thought or depth of reflection. It may be questioned whether they could succeed in the abstruse sciences, though they have, nevertheless, some fancy and humour, and the domestics of respectable families are complete facsimiles of the different branches of it, not only in dress but in habits and manners.

Among the number of ice cream gardens in this city, there was none in which the sable race could find admission and refreshment. Their modicum of pleasure was taken on Sunday evening, when the black dandys and dandizettes, after attending meeting, occupied the sidewalks in Broadway, and slowly lounged towards their different homes. As their number increased, and their consequence strengthened; partly from high wages, high living, and the elective franchise; it was considered necessary to have a place of amusement for them exclusively.—Accordingly, a garden has been opened somewhere back of the hospital called African Grove; not spicy as those of Arabia, (but let that pass) at which the ebony lads and lasses could obtain ice cream, ice punch, and hear music from the big drum and clarionet. The little boxes in this garden were filled with black beauties "making night hideous"; and it was not an uninteresting sight to observe the entree of a happy pair. The gentleman, with his wool nicely combed, and his face shining through a coat of sweet oil, borrowed from the castors; cravat tight to suffocation, having the double faculty of widening the mouth and giving a remarkable protuberance to the eyes; blue coat fashionably cut; red ribbon and a bunch of pinchback seals; wide pantaloons; shining boots, gloves, and a tippy rattan. The lady, with her pink kid slippers; her fine Leghorn, cambric dress, with open work; corsets well fitted; reticule, hanging on her arm. Thus accoutered and caparisoned, these black fashionables saunter up and down the garden, in all the pride of liberty and unconsciousness of want. In their address; salutations; familiar phrases; and compliments; their imitative faculties are best exhibited. After a vile concerto by the garden band, a company of four in a box commenced conversation, having disposed of a glass of ice cream each.

"You like music, Miss? Can't say I like it much. I once could play Paddy Cary, on the piano; our young ladies learnt me. Did you eber hear Phillips sing, 'Is dare a heart dat neber lov'd'? I sing xactly like him; Harry tell us some news. De Greeks are gone to war wid de Turks. O! Dat's bery clever; and our gentlemen said at dinner yesterday, dat de Greeks had taken Constantinople, and all de wives of de Dey of Algiers. O shocking! Veil, Miss, ven is de happy day; ven vill you enter de matrimony state *Dat's* my business: Gentlemen musn't meddle with dese delicate tings. Beg pardon Miss. O! no offence—Harry, who did you vote for at de election? De fedrilists to be sure; I never wotes for de mob. Our gentlemen brought home tickets and after dinner, ve all vent and woted. Miss how you like to go to de springs? I shouldn't like it; too many negers from de suthard, and such crowd of folks, that decent people can get no refreshments."

Thus they run the rounds of fashions; ape their masters and mistresses in everything; talk of projected matches; rehearse the news of the kitchen, and the follies of the day; and bating the "tincture of their skins," are as well qualified to move in the *haut ton*, as many of the white dandies and butterflies, who flutter in the sun shine. They fear no Missouri plot; care for no political rights; happy in being permitted to dress fashionable, walk the streets, visit African Grove, and talk scandal.