

ADA EXHIBITION TEXT
LARGE TYPE

**Alexandre
Dumas's Afro
Blackness
Caricatured, Erased
& Back Again**

Introduction

Alexandre Dumas père (father)—the celebrated and prolific nineteenth-century author of *The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*, among many others—was a man of mixed race whose father, seen here at left, served as a general in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. Like his father, Dumas père chose to bear the surname of General Dumas’s slave mother rather than the white aristocratic planter who owned her. Yet his Blackness has come in and out of view, sometimes attacked, sometimes erased, and sometimes celebrated.

Like so many during this century of explosive innovation, including a rapidly expanding press and the birth of photography, Dumas père was thrilled by celebrity, but he also understood its price. He lamented that the celebrated man exchanged “sweet obscurity for the devouring light of success,” thereby “selling himself” and becoming “a slave” to “publicity.”

No physical change had occurred; nonetheless [the celebrity] was not the same man; he no longer belonged to himself; for applause and honors, he had sold himself to the public. He was now a slave of caprice, fashion, even cabals. He could feel his name torn from him as a fruit from a branch. Publicity with its thousands of voices,

would break him into pieces, scatter him over the world and now, even if he wanted to, it was no longer in his power to reverse the process and go back to a private life.

This exhibition reassembles the “scattered pieces” of Dumas père and his circle, including the notorious American actress Adah Isaacs Menken. Photographs, caricatures, newspapers, and comic books from the personal collection of Professor Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby pose complicated questions about caricature’s exaggerations, racial typologies, individuation, portraiture, and the rights to one’s image.

This exhibition is organized by BAMPFA staff and guest curated by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor in the Arts and Humanities at UC Berkeley, and Vanessa Jackson, a PhD candidate in the history of art at UC Berkeley, in collaboration with four undergraduate researchers: Krista McAtee, Riley Saham, Antonio Soto-Beltran, and Molly Wendel. The exhibition is based on Grigsby's collection and accompanies the publication of her book *Creole: Portraits of France's Foreign Relations During the Long Nineteenth Century* (2022). A Black Collaboratory Grant partly funded Vanessa Jackson's research.

Alexandre Dumas's Afro: Blackness Caricatured, Erased & Back Again is the sixth in a series of annual exhibitions, Cal Conversations, developed in collaboration with UC Berkeley faculty and students.

All works are from the collection of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, unless otherwise indicated.

General Dumas, Born a Slave in Haiti

This statue of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, born a slave in Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti), originally stood in Paris's Place Malesherbes (now Place du Général Catroux), alongside statues commemorating his son, Alexandre Dumas père, and grandson Alexandre Dumas fils. Installed in 1912, it remained covered for more than a year and was called the "forgotten statue" and "scarecrow."

Thirty years later, Nazis occupying Paris destroyed the statue as an act of "purification." Only in 2009 was another monument to General Dumas erected, but this sculpture of colossal broken shackles did not honor the man or his

military feats. Criticism of the statue led the city council to approve the reinstallation of a copy of the original in 2021, but it has not yet been erected.

LEFT

Covered and uncovered bronze monument to General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, 1912 (destroyed 1942).

The Beginning of the Dumas Family in France: Three Generations of Men Who Took the Slave Mother's Name and Rejected That of the French Aristocrat

Cezette Dumas—the Black slave mother of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, the grandmother of Alexandre Dumas père, and the great-grandmother of Alexandre Dumas fils—bore four children with her owner, Marquis Alexandre-Antoine Davy de la Pailleterie. Only Thomas-Alexandre was eventually freed and recognized by his French father.

All three generations of celebrated mixed-race Dumas men chose to bear the name of their enslaved ancestor, not the name of her white aristocratic owner, but all three also married and had children with white French women. When Thomas-Alexandre called himself the “son of Antoine and Cezette Dumas,” he not only erased his paternal aristocratic name, but also gave his white aristocratic French father the name of his slave mother.

LEFT TO RIGHT

General Dumas, c. 1808; print.

Etienne Carjat: *Alexandre Dumas*, 1865;
cabinet card: albumen print; BAMPFA collection,
gift of Jan Leonard and Jerrold R. Piel.

Pierre Petit: *Alexandre Dumas (fils)*, c. 1860;
carte de visite: albumen print.

Repeated Erasures of General Dumas, Whose Brave Combat Inspired His Son's *The Three Musketeers* and More

Depictions of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas are rare and posthumous; he was not commemorated in oil painting during his lifetime. Here he is depicted in the cheap, ephemeral, “low art” illustrated press, which resembles present-day comic books.

During a 1798 revolt in Cairo against Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation, General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas stormed a mosque. According to General Dumas's son, Alexandre Dumas père, Napoleon promised to memorialize him in Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson's 1810 painting of the conflict, a picture oddly devoid of

a heroic protagonist. Dumas père said the missing hero was his father, who was erased by Napoleon: the “tall fair hussar, of no name or practically no rank . . . took the place of my father” because Napoleon never forgave him for prematurely leaving Egypt after the two had a falling-out. General Dumas returned to France broken and blind in one eye after a two-year imprisonment in Italy as a prisoner of war. In Girodet’s painting, a Black man squats at center, holding the decapitated head of a French soldier.

ABOVE

Boussod & Valadon (after Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson): *Revolt of Cairo*, 1893; typogravure.

BELOW

“A Hero of the Epoch: General Dumas Fighting the Austrians,” illustrated supplement of *Petit Journal*, no. 14, 1912.

General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas's outsize heroic feats, his courage, and his mistreatment were given form in his adoring son's novels and plays. Their mass appeal has persisted internationally—not only in the novels themselves, but also in Hollywood movies, comic books, and children's literature. The Black Haitian general's history has thereby been cast as fantastic and fictional—and also as white, not Black.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

“The Three Musketeers,” *Classics Illustrated Comics*, no. 1, 1946 (“Golden Age” 1938–55).

“The Count of Monte Cristo,” *Classics Illustrated Comics*, no. 3, 1946 (“Golden Age” 1938–55).

“The Man in the Iron Mask,” *Classics Illustrated Comics*, no. 54, 1948 (“Golden Age” 1938–55).

The US Civil Rights Era Recovers the Dumas Family's Blackness

The Blackness of the Dumas family entered comic books in the 1960s and 1970s, when Black author Bertram Fitzgerald published *Golden Legacy* comics. The series of sixteen comics for children provided a positive representation of historical Black figures, including the three generations of the Dumas family. Emphasizing the family's Black Haitian heritage, the comic does not mention Alexandre Dumas père's and fils's white mothers.

Unfortunately, production of the *Golden Legacy* series stalled in the early 1980s, due to a five-year-long copyright infringement lawsuit by a white plaintiff.

Fitzgerald ultimately won back his rights, but he was never compensated for his losses and was nearly bankrupted. Nonetheless, *Golden Legacy* comics received critical acclaim, and many of their Black artists and writers went on to achieve fame, including cartoonist, author, and children's books illustrator Tom Feelings (1933–2003); artist and writer Joan Bacchus Maynard (1928–2006); and cartoonist Ezra Jackson (1926–1996).

ABOVE

Three Dumas men (general, père, fils) on Haitian postage stamp on air mail envelope, 20th century.

BELOW

“Alexandre Dumas and Family,” *Golden Legacy: Illustrated History Magazine*, Vol. 6, 1969.

Dumas's Bodily Metamorphoses: The Early Portraits of the Romantic Writer, Early 1830s

Alexandre Dumas père's appearance and portrayal changed radically over his lifetime in an increasingly racist France. Fascinated with his appearance, sometimes self-loathing, Dumas père himself tracked his body's transformations across his *Memoirs*.

In an early anecdote, he described himself as having “long, fair, curly (*bouclé*) hair, . . . which did not crimp (*crêpèrent*) until my fifteenth year; large blue eyes . . . ; a straight nose, small and well-shaped; thick red sensitive lips.” But as a young man, he claimed that his “dazzlingly white” skin had become

“dark.” He wrote, “I never was good-looking, but I was tall and well built . . . ; my face was thin, and I had large brown eyes, with a dark complexion. . . . If it was impossible [for me] to create beauty, it was easy enough to form character.”

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Charles Étienne Pierre Motte: “Alexandre Dumas,” *Galerie de la presse de la littérature et des beaux arts*, 1831; lithograph.

Junca (after Bernard Romain Julien): “A. Dumas” and “V. Hugo,” *Le Charivari*, February 2, 1832; lithograph.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT

François-Séraphin Delpech: *Portrait d’Alexandre Dumas*, 1833; lithograph.

Antoine Fonrouge (after Cecile Brand): “Alexandre Dumas,” *Le Voleur*, 1833; lithograph.

Dumas, The Romantic Playwright of the 1830s

This caricature depicts actress Mlle. Augustine Duverger in a later revival of Alexandre Dumas père's sensational, successful play *Antony*, first performed in 1831. Contemporaries, including Théophile Gautier, described the “frenzy” of its reception: “The evening of the first performance of ANTONY in 1831. It was an uproar, a tumult, an effervescence . . . no exaggeration could describe it. The audience was delirious; they clapped, sobbed, wept and shouted. . . . The burning passion of the play set every heart aflame.”

Henri Meyer: “Mlle. Duverger (in *Antony*),” cover of *Diogène*, 1867; lithograph.

Dumas, the Traveler and Travel Writer

Alexandre Dumas père wrote not only plays, novels, and memoirs, but also popular travel accounts, reviews of performances (including opera), and even a cookbook. Here he straddles a gorge with a bag containing his “impressions of Voyages” slung over his shoulder; his towering hair echoes the mountain behind him.

ABOVE

Benjamin Roubaud: “Torrent 25 Feet Wide,”
Le Charivari, September 28, 1838; lithograph.

Caption: “Alexandre Dumas wanders to give us /
impressions of travel. / The public is so content with
the work / That it always would like, I wager, / to send
the author for a walk.”

Alexandre Dumas père visited Naples in 1835 and later resided there for three years, from 1861 to 1864. A friend and ardent supporter of the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, Dumas père was named director of the museums of Naples and the director of excavations at Pompeii.

BELOW

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé):
“M. Alexandre Dumas in Naples,” 1855; lithograph.

Caption: “Named Director of the museums of Naples, M. Dumas takes a chair [the throne] to install in his office.”

Caption: “Named director of excavations [at Pompeii] in the kingdom of Naples, M. Dumas begins his research.”

Dumas Adapts His Long Novels into Excessively Long Plays

In 1846 Alexandre Dumas père built a theater that showcased plays adapted by the writer from his historical novels. This caricature mocks the very first performance, a ten-act adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo* that took place over two consecutive days. The play was poorly received in Paris; in London there was rioting because of its length. At the bottom left of this caricature, a child enters the theater and exits as a bent old man. The last two vignettes satirize the violence on stage, as well as the utter exhaustion of female members of the audience, who require resuscitation.

ABOVE

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): "Analysis of the Drama of Monte-Cristo in Four Folio Volumes," *L'Illustration*, March 14, 1846; wood engraving.

BOTTOM ROW

"A Spectator entering the Théâtre Dumas at the beginning of Monte-Cristo"

"The same spectator leaving at the end of Monte-Cristo"

"The last scene of the opening play of the Théâtre Dumas"

"Grrrrrand effect produced"

Claiming its artists were eyewitnesses, the *Illustrated London News* captioned this picture of Alexandre Dumas père held aloft during the French Revolution of 1848: “M. Alexandre Dumas, being recognized in the streets, was caught up by the enthusiastic crowd, and carried in triumph.”

In fact, Dumas père was a nervous participant in France’s revolutions of 1830 and 1848, daunted by the heroism of his military father. In his *Memoirs*, he also recounted that one former slave owner from Haiti was horrified when she saw him and mistook the French revolution for a Black uprising.

BELOW

This is another caricature mocking the length of Dumas père's plays: "Revival of the Revival of the Musketeers."

A complicated scene. The play was so long that they had to play all the acts at the same time."

Writing Words to Pay for His Extravagance: Always in Debt, Always Entertaining, Always Writing

In the 1840s, while building and directing a theater, Alexandre Dumas père built a lavish Renaissance residence, the Château of Monte-Cristo, described by Honoré de Balzac, as “one of the most delicious follies ever created.” A second, smaller Gothic building, the Château of If, served as his office and was named after the prison in his novel. Above the entrance of the Château of Monte-Cristo is inscribed Dumas père’s self-revelatory, unabashedly needy motto: “I love those who love me.”

Despite writing incessantly to finance the buildings' ostentation, Dumas père was forced to sell the property and its furnishings in 1849 at a great loss. The buyer, an American dentist, allowed Dumas père to retain his residence until 1851, when he left France to avoid creditors.

LEFT

“Alexandre Dumas Père’s Chateau de Monte-Cristo,”
L’Illustration, February 26, 1848.

Prolific Dumas

Alexandre Dumas père's prominence as a celebrated and, most of all, prolific author largely stems from his embrace of a newly popularized form of literary production that arose during the nineteenth century—the *roman-feuilleton*, or serial novels, that appeared as installments in newspapers.

Dumas père, often motivated by financial need, wrote unceasingly, to which this caricature not so subtly alludes. A dandified Dumas père is propped on a chair as he wields quills in his hands, feet, mouth, and even back in order to “fulfill all his commitments.”

LEFT

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): “Alexandre Dumas Working to Fulfill All His Commitments,” *L'Illustration*, March 14, 1846; wood engraving.

The Scandal of a Mixed-Race Author Using White *Nègres*

While the practice of writing with collaborators was common, especially in the theater, Alexandre Dumas père's reliance on ghostwriters elicited vitriolic denunciations, partly because ghostwriters were called *nègres* in France. According to one virulent critic, Dumas père's white ghostwriters had been "reduced to the condition of *nègres*, laboring under the whip of a mulatto." In this caricature, a brown Dumas père forces disembodied white hands to be his *nègres* in order to enrich himself. The caption denigrates the *roman-feuilleton* (serial novels) published in newspapers.

With an astonishing lack of self-consciousness, the term *nègres* was used in France until 2017, when the Ministry of Culture finally denounced the practice in response to pressure from the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires de France (Council of Black Associations of France).

RIGHT

“Feuilletons, Novels, Dramas, and Other Mechanical Products,” *Le Charivari*, December 25, 1845.

Here Auguste Maquet, Alexandre Dumas père's longtime collaborator (*nègre*), casts a shadow that caricatures Dumas père's profile. The classical inscription on the scroll at upper right, "Sic Vos Non Vobis" ("For you, but not yours"), suggests that Maquet was not only uncredited by Dumas père but also plagiarized.

In the publicity image for the 2010 film *L'Autre Dumas*, Gérard Dépardieu, a blond-wigged Dumas père, exploits an overtired Maquet until tensions come to the fore. The Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires de France (Council of Black Associations of France) criticized the decision to cast the white actor as Dumas père, who "was the grandson of a Haitian slave and often referred to himself as a negro." The film

thereby repressed and inadvertently drew attention to Dumas père's Black ancestry.

ABOVE

Publicity image for the film *L'Autre Dumas*, 2010.

BELOW

Edward Ancourt: "Auguste Maquet," *Le Bouffon*, March 8, 1868.

Dumas's Afro: Caricatures of Racial Difference

The lean Romantic playwright of the 1830s was caricatured differently as he aged and became stout. After the second abolition of slavery in 1848, French society became *more* not less racist; when slavery, a social institution, no longer existed to legitimate inequity, race was used to define Black people as inferior. Caricaturists shifted focus to the physiognomic features of Alexandre Dumas père's head, which was exaggerated in different ways. His Blackness was seldom signified by his skin color; instead, his exuberant, towering, curly hair—his “Afro”—was the consistent sign of his Black difference.

ABOVE

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé):
“New Dramatic Bouillabaisse by Dumas Père,”
Le Charivari, March 31, 1858.

Caption: “My cooking is beginning to take shape—
a little more garlic and it will be perfect!”

BELOW

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri, Comte de Noé):
“M. Alexandre Dumas in Naples,” 1855.

Caption: “Mont Vesuvius begins to fear confusion
with Dumas, both having almost the same coiffure.”

Nadar: “Une nouvelle mère Gigogne,” *Journal pour
rire*, January 28, 1854.

Here Dumas père is the colossal mother holding a
bulging purse and manipulating her fictional progeny
as marionettes.

Alexandre Dumas père's successful play *The Tower of Nesle* was written in collaboration with Frederic Gaillardet, with whom Dumas père would eventually duel over royalties. The play is a lurid melodrama about Queen Marguerite de Burgundy, wife of Louis X, and her (fabricated) tempestuous dalliance with Jean Buridan. The queen purportedly often had her partners killed after sex and dropped into the Seine.

ABOVE, TOP

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé):
“Buridan, you will follow me to Marseille,”
Le Charivari, 1858.

ABOVE, BOTTOM

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé):
“Rehearsal the Marseille Theater,” *Le Charivari*, 1858.

The caricaturist Cham's (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé) focus on Alexandre Dumas père's racial difference was linked to Cham's descent from the slave owner of the heroic Haitian Revolutionary leader Toussaint-Louverture. Yet Dumas père would call Cham a friend in 1866, even claiming that caricatures were "the only portraits resembling me that have been made until now."

LEFT

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): "M. Alexandre Dumas Wanting Identically to Imitate . . . Can't Make His Hair Fall Like That of the Other," 1858; lithograph.

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): May 16, 1858. Caption: "Papa, why the devil did you expose yourself to the sun of Marseilles? You had just begun to become white."

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): “The Russians Habituated to Their Blonde Alexandres No Longer Find Them When Seeing Alexandre Dumas,” 1858; lithograph.

Dumas père was in Russia from 1858 to 1859.

Like W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon, Alexandre Dumas père was split, not just as a man of color in a white society, but as a mixed-race man who alternately identified with Blacks and whites. In 1838, for example, he wrote a letter to Cyrille Bissette, the mixed-race abolitionist editor of the *Revue des colonies*, expressing his solidarity with his “brothers in race and friends of color.”

Yet Dumas père repeatedly described his Black servants as simpletons, including Alexis, an Antillean boy who was a “gift” from a friend. Most despicably, Dumas père’s story of finding Alexis hidden inside a basket of flowers, the whites of his eyes standing out from the darkness, appears not in his *Memoirs* but in his *History of Pets* (*Histoire de bêtes*).

Dumas père's participation in French society's racism also appears in *Georges* (1843), his one novel about the Caribbean and race. The idealized protagonist is the light-skinned mulatto Georges, who can pass as white, while his dark-skinned brother is a cruel slave trader. In 1975 Ballantine Books marketed the novel as "seething with rage," "thirsting for justice," and "burning with vengeance." The novel is complicated, but the cover exploits its own racial hierarchy.

LEFT TO RIGHT

"Tiens! Un Nègre," Alexandre Dumas's *Histoire de mes Bêtes*, 1877.

Dumas père's *Georges*, originally published in 1843, was his only novel addressing slavery, race, and the Caribbean. Long overlooked, it was only recently translated into English.

A Specific Kind of Caricature: The “Charged Portrait”

Nadar’s father published Alexandre Dumas père’s first play and novel, and the future photographer, eighteen years Dumas père’s junior, hung a portrait of the writer in his childhood bedroom.

Nadar’s gigantic lithograph *Pantheon Nadar* (1854) included hundreds of distinctive caricatures of authors, including Dumas père and Alexandre Dumas fils, and equated celebrity with the individuality of *portraits-chargés* (charged portraits), which exaggerated features in order to enhance rather than diminish recognition. Despite caricaturists’ typical reliance on racial stereotypes (like Cham), Dumas père did not repudiate caricature—perhaps because he equated it with celebrity.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Nadar: “Dumas,” on cover of
Les Binettes contemporains, 1854/58.

Nadar: “Dumas (père),”
Les Binettes contemporains, 1854/58.

Nadar: “Dumas (fils),”
Les Binettes contemporains, 1854/58.

Nadar: “Maquet,”
Les Binettes contemporains, 1854/58.

This caricature of Alexandre Dumas père was removed from this context and printed elsewhere with the caption “King of the Chimpanzees.”

BELOW

“Les Photographes par Marcelin,” *Le Petit journal pour rire*, 1856.

Clockwise: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (painter), Eugène Delacroix (painter), Antoine-Augustin Préault (sculptor), Alexandre Dumas père.

This page from a scrapbook includes a landscape print, a *portrait-charge* of Alexandre Dumas père, and four small rebuses or puzzles in which words are represented by combinations of pictures and individual letters (a picture of an ape followed by a letter *X* to represent the word *apex*, for example).

Cutting up and playfully assembling different newspapers' caricatures, texts, prints, and games on one page, this maker created what the inexpensive illustrated press so skillfully and wittily modeled: whimsical fabulations that spotlight celebrities.

ABOVE

Scrapbook page, late 1860s.

Alexandre Dumas père praised caricature—“caricatures being the only portraits resembling me that have been made until now”—and accurately pointed out his absence from conventional portraiture and thus from high art.

How, one might ask, could this Black man praise caricature? And how could he liken Cham’s crude and unapologetically racist cartoons to the affectionate, subtle *portraits-chargés* made by Nadar, his longtime admirer? Were caricature’s excesses more attentive to the physiognomic features that Dumas père valued as his own? Did portrait painters tone down non-white characteristics? Was he proud of his differences? Or perhaps Dumas père valued publicity above all. While

racism generalizes, portraiture tries to individualize—and so too did the *portraits-chargés* that circulated in the mass media.

BELOW

Inscribed in handwriting on the cover of *La Lune* by André Gill, December 2, 1866:

“I authorize the journal *La Lune* to publish my *chargé*, caricatures being the only portraits resembling me that have been made until now. Alex. Dumas”

“Charged Busts”

Like caricaturists, sculptors made *portraits-chargés* of celebrities (statue busts), but their works also circulated as two-dimensional images in newspapers, books, and prints. Here the sculptor Jean-Pierre Dantan’s silhouetted *buste-chargé* of Alexandre Dumas père was one of one hundred published in his book of celebrities, *Musée Dantan: Galerie des charges et croquis des célébrités de l’époque* (1839). The accompanying text explains that the rendition of Dumas père had to reflect his African roots and his “not so silky hair.” The author humorously added that Dumas père’s friends have nothing but praise for him and that he only kills, poisons, and “guillotines” in his fiction.

ABOVE

Jean-Pierre Dantan: “Bustes chargé, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas,” *Le Charivari*, 1835.

BELOW

Jean-Pierre Dantan: *Musée Dantan, Galerie de charges et croquis des célébrités de l'époque*, 1839.

Alexandre Dumas père owned and edited two newspapers: *Le Mois* (1848–50) and *Le Mousquetaire* (1853–57). They were devoted to romance, travel, memoirs, poetry, and criticism of art, music, and especially theater, as well as his “causeries” or conversations.

ABOVE

André Gill: “The Small Press,” cover of *L’Eclipse*, February 9, 1868.

BELOW

André Gill: “Masks to Rent or Not,” cover of *L’Eclipse*, February 23, 1868.

The caption on the mask of Alexandre Dumas père at the lower left reads, “To dance with a black ball” (not *at* a black ball), a misuse of language.

Achille Lemot: “Alexandre Dumas,” cover of *Monde pour rire*, March 20, 1869.

Portraits-Chargés: When Caricaturists Caricature Themselves and One Another

TOP LEFT

André Gill: “And. Gill, par X...,” cover of *La Lune*, September 15, 1867. The caricaturist caricatures himself.

TOP RIGHT

André Gill: “Cham,” cover of *L’Eclipse*, December 27, 1874. The caricaturist caricatures another caricaturist, Cham.

BOTTOM LEFT

P. Bernais: “H. Daumier,” cover of *Le Hanneton*, 1867. Caption: “I authorize the journal *Le Hanneton* to publish my *chargé*.”

Blackface

In this *portrait-charge*, Marie-Célestine Galli-Marié de l'Isle (1837–1905), a French mezzo-soprano, is being painted with shoe polish for her performance in blackface as the Caribbean figure of Friday in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. This caricature is one of many nineteenth-century cartoons attesting to the longstanding French fascination with blackface. In this case, there is the additional titillation of a (white) woman cross-dressing as a (Black) man.

BOTTOM RIGHT

André Gill: "Mme. Galli-Marié (Role of Friday in Robinson Crusoe)," cover of *La Lune*, December 1, 1867.

Inscription on the pedestal at left: "Good Shoe Polish for Friday."

Dumas in Photographs

When Alexandre Dumas père praised caricatures as his best portraits (for lack of paintings, sculptures, and prints), he oddly chose to overlook photography's dissemination of his likeness. His omission is surprising given his frequent sittings for numerous photographers, including his friend Nadar, who had become even more famous in that medium than in caricature. Moreover, the best photographs of Dumas père, including Nadar's portrait and these two cartes de visite, are bold and vital; they fully convey the charisma of the man.

ABOVE

Various artists (Nadar, Pierre Petit, Charles Reutlinger, anonymous): Alexandre Dumas, mid-1850s–60s; cartes de visite: albumen prints.

Nadar: *Alexandre Dumas*, 1855; carte de visite: albumen print.

BELOW

Dumas in Russia, 1858; carte de visite: albumen print.

Pierre Petit: *Alexandre Dumas*, 1867; carte de visite: albumen print.

The Scandal of Notoriety: Dumas and Adah Isaacs Menken on Trial

Alexandre Dumas père was repeatedly demeaned as childlike, but these assaults intensified as the result of a scandal precipitated by the 1867 circulation of photographs of sixty-five-year-old Dumas père posing with the notorious, racially ambiguous American actress Adah Isaacs Menken. On the insistence of his children, Dumas père went to court to suppress the photographs' circulation, despite the fact that he had meant for them to be circulated.

Fundamentally, the trial concerned Dumas père's disregard of the boundaries between public and private

life. The lawyer opposing his claim argued that he had forfeited his rights to the photographs because he “loves his [image] a little more than is right. Not only does he love it, but he wants it to be loved by all, and as that requires that it be known, he exposes it, he publishes it, he details it.”

In these frankly intimate portraits, Menken sometimes resembles an affectionate daughter, but her notoriety ensured that she was read as Dumas père’s mistress. If Dumas père “dreaded publicity,” as he claimed, why did he strip to his shirt sleeves and brag to the photographer, “You will see, this pose will be sought after”?

At the height of the Dumas trial, the *Law Journal* asserted that Dumas père’s

“private life . . . has certainly been made more public than that of any man in France; he has written of himself, talked of himself, and sat for pictures in every attitude and . . . dress—has in fact completely held up to view the *dishabille* [*sic*] of his life.” *Déshabillé* here connotes a state of undress, but also the (over-) exposure of his life.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Pierre Petit and Alphonse Liébert: *Alexandre Dumas and Adah Isaacs Menken*, 1867; cartes de visite.

Adah Isaacs Menken

The early life of Adah Isaacs Menken is ambiguous. Some believe she was born in Tennessee, others in New Orleans. Menken herself once claimed to have been born in Bordeaux, France. Her stories were always changing, and even today scholars celebrate her as Jewish, African American, and Creole.

As Black scholar Daphne Brooks pointed out, Menken “assumed a half dozen pseudonyms throughout her life, identified five different men as her father, and claimed to have had at least five husbands in sixteen years.” Brooks proposed that Menken was born in New Orleans in 1839 to a free man of color (mulatto) and a white Creole mother. In 1868 a Boston newspaper referred to

her as a “dusky” quadroon (one-quarter Black), but she chose to thwart any such certainty.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Theo [?]: “Adah Menken. Théâtre du Chatelet. Reprise des *Pirates de la Savane*,” 1866.

Achille Lemot: “Miss Addah Menken,” cover of *Monde pour rire*, July 31, 1868.

Adah Isaacs Menken first shocked audiences in Europe by performing half naked while strapped to a horse in the play *Mazeppa*. Although her work was not generally well received by critics, her salacious career repeatedly placed her in the spotlight.

The title of this work, “Miss Dada Menken,” refers to a cheeky nickname given to her by the people of Paris. While the word *dada* sounds like Adah and is a nursery name for a rocking horse, it is also a rude joke word for a type of sexual position in French street slang. The innuendo of the equine *Mazeppa* star, Black Bess, and Menken engaging in crude acts further exoticized, sexualized, and perhaps queered her in the eyes of the public.

ABOVE

Hippolyte Maily: “Caricature of actor Dumaine (stage name of Louis Francois Person) with Adah Isaacs Menken as centaur, that is, half horse,” based on *Le Hanneton* cover, May 23, 1867.

Handwritten authorization at lower left dated March 25, 1867. Dumaine is dressed in a costume resembling that of Menken in *Les pirates de la savanne* (*The Pirates of the Savannah*).

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT

André Gill: “Miss Dada Menken, Théâtre de la Gaité,” cover of *La Lune*, February 10, 1867.

“Adah Isaacs Menken,” cover of *Le Hanneton*, May 23, 1867.

Repeatedly caricatured on the cover of newspapers, Adah Isaacs Menken also posed for hundreds of cartes de visite that she staged. In an array of costumes and theatrical, often erotic, scenarios, she authored her own celebrity. These inexpensive photographs were intended to challenge society's expectations and to court scandal. An ambiguous shapeshifter, Menken sought fame through notoriety. According to Mark Twain, she was "a magnificent spectacle"—not a star but "a whole constellation." Walt Whitman also praised her, as did Charles Dickens, who wrote the introduction to her book of poetry.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT

Charles Reutlinger: Adah Isaacs Menken as Mazeppa, c. 1864; cartes de visite: albumen prints.

Charles Reutlinger: Adah Isaacs Menken in various roles, 1860s; cartes de visite: albumen prints

Napoleon Sarony (photographer): Adah Isaacs Menken in role of Léon, a Mexican slave, in the play, *Child of the Sun*, New York City, 1866; cartes de visite.

Adah Isaacs Menken, 1860s; cartes de visite: albumen prints. The last photograph is based on a photographic session with André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, c. 1865.

The Vexed Relationship of Dumas's Children to Their Flamboyant (and Darker) Father

Marie-Alexandrine Dumas, Alexandre Dumas père's intermittently estranged daughter, was perhaps most upset about the proliferation of the cartes de visite of her father and Adah Isaacs Menken—because she was also implicated in the scandal. Her father had brought her to Adolphe Liébert's studio along with Menken, and she was mentioned in the court case and press.

The carte de visite of Menken, age thirty-one, with an older woman shows her standing solicitously in her underclothes next to Dumas père's thirty-six-year-old daughter, seated with one hand around

Menken's waist and the other tenderly holding her hand. Curiously, *Le Figaro* falsely identified Marie-Alexandrine as Menken's mother, an attempt to normalize the women's physical intimacy. The photographs scrambled family relations and sexualized contact amid the already fraught mix of racially ambiguous persons.

RIGHT

Adolphe Liébert: *Adah Isaacs Menken & Marie Alexandrine Dumas*, 1867; carte de visite: albumen print; courtesy of Ron Sheely.

In this print, Alexandre Dumas fils, the white-passing son of the author of *The Three Musketeers* and the grandson of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, appears to bear the burden of his father's fame. On the day of his appointment to the French Academy, Dumas fils climbs up the stairs wielding a massive sculpture bust of his father, who had never received that honor. Yet when the junior Dumas was asked whom he succeeded at the Academy, he replied, "My father." As André Maurois argued, "This was a protest, a reparation and a brilliant theatrical reply. . . . The poor Academy, once too haughty, has begun to examine its old sins."

LEFT

Alfred Le Petit: *Alexandre Dumas (Fils)*, 1875; print

Cham (Amédée Charles Henri de Noé): May 16, 1858.

Caption: “Papa, why the devil did you expose yourself to the sun of Marseilles? You had just begun to become white.”

Dumas Père Turned into a Child by the Court

“It is said that the black man likes to palaver . . . and it is only a short step to a new theory that the black man is just a child.”

**—Frantz Fanon,
Black Skin, White Masks, 1952**

Alexandre Dumas père’s lawyer argued that the writer should be considered a minor, and according to *Le Figaro*, the court “treated him the way one treats children who have done badly, but who lack the full understanding that gives the misconduct all its gravity.” The tactic worked, and Dumas père won the right to stop the sale of the photographs of him and Adah Isaacs Menken.

In this caricature from the period, a baby Dumas père sits on a highchair potty; Menken serves as his naughty rocking horse. Yet even as a toddler, Dumas père appears a prolific writer: he holds a quill from which a musketeer hangs, and pages scattered at his feet indicate his different kinds of writings. *Portraits-chargés* consistently placed large heads on diminutive bodies, but in Dumas père's case, that convention read as infantilism, emphasizing his immaturity. Childish, yet so exasperatingly gigantic, the mixed-race author is depicted as a piercingly intelligent and gargantuan toddler.

RIGHT

Hippolyte Maily: "Alexandre Dumas (Père)," cover of *Le Hanneton*, June 20, 1867.

The portrayal of Alexandre Dumas père as more immature than his son preceded the scandal, but in 1867 Dumas père was repeatedly depicted as an infant. In one print captioned, “This kid is the despair of his son,” Dumas père is a toddler putting his finger to his mouth. Here Dumas père, at the lower right, is represented as a child, while Alexandre Dumas fils stands tall and upright.

LEFT

André Gill: “The Gentlemen of the Novel,”
Le Charivari, May 1867.

Another caricature of Alexandre Dumas père from the year of the trial includes the conventionally enlarged head of the *portrait-charge*, which now connotes his freakishness as an intelligent man-child.

RIGHT

Edward Ancourt: "Alexandre Dumas,"
cover of *Le Bouffon*, October 27, 1867.

The *Golden Legacy* comic about the Dumas family also depicted Alexandre Dumas père as a child—as a young son sitting on the lap of his military father. Dumas père lost his father before the age of four, and his larger-than-life heroism, swashbuckling military campaigns, mistreatment, incarceration, and tragic loss structured his son’s life and writings. Dumas père wrote: “I adored my father. Perhaps . . . the feeling which today I call love was only a naive astonishment at that Herculean stature and that gigantic strength I’d seen him display on so many occasions . . . [but] even today the memory of my father, in every detail . . . is as present to me as if I had lost him yesterday.” This childlike wonder and desire for a lost paternal love informed the author’s fantastic

fabulations about camaraderie among men. Notably, Dumas père's memory of his father "in every detail" does not include his Blackness.

ABOVE

Alfred de Moncel: Statue of General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, commissioned 1890s, installed Fall 1912, photographed 1913 by an unknown municipal statue photographer.

BELOW

"Alexandre Dumas and Family,"
Golden Legacy: Illustrated History Magazine 6, 1969.

The Vitrine

Maurice Leloir (illustrator) and Jules Huyot (engraver): Frontispiece to Alexandre Dumas, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1894). This image shows the whitened author as a prolific “genius.”

Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers* (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1978). Dumas père is depicted as a Black man in 1978.

In this racist tract, Mirecourt condemns serial novels and Dumas père’s reliance on ghostwriters, called *nègres* in French, denouncing the fact that his white ghostwriter had been “reduced to the condition of *nègres*, laboring under the whip of a mulatto.” He also emphasizes the contradictions between Dumas père’s Black and white, African and aristocratic heritage. Indicting his masquerade as a French aristocrat, he writes: “Scratch the surface of M. Dumas and you will find the savage. He holds together the *nègre* and the marquis. But the marquis hardly extends beyond the skin. Take away the make-up, tear at the disheveled costume, . . . prick any point of the civilized surface, and soon the *nègre* will show his teeth.”

Hand-painted French plastic figurines, included with Mokarex coffee beginning in 1946. The company also hosted hand-painting competitions.

General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, hand-painted metal figurine, first issued by Métal Modèles, 2015. The company, founded in November 1989 by Bruno Leibovitz, is based in the south of France. Collectors buy unpainted models and freely paint their complexion.

Joseph Benoit Guichard: *Alexandre Dumas (Père)*, 1828; oil on canvas; 4 3/4 in. diameter; © 2018 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Mathieu Rabeau.

Darcy Grimaldo Grisby, *Creole: Portraits of France's Foreign Relations During the Long Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA, 2022).

This is one of the few paintings depicting Alexandre Dumas père during his lifetime.

Dumas père owned and edited two newspapers: *Le Mois*, 1848–50, and *Le Mousquetaire*, 1853–57. They were devoted to romance, travel, memoirs, poetry, criticism of art, music, and especially the theatre, as well as his wide-ranging “causeries” or conversations.

Many of Dumas père’s novels were made into comic books, contributing to his reputation as a children’s author.

Classics Illustrated # 20, “The Corsican Brothers,” by Alexandre Dumas, 1945.

Classics Illustrated # 41, “Twenty Years After,” 1947.

Classics Illustrated # 113, “The Forty-Five Guardsmen,” by Alexandre Dumas, 1953.

Classics Illustrated # 41, “Twenty Years After,” by Alexandre Dumas, 1970.

Ousmane Sow: Statue of Victor Hugo, 2002; installed in Besançon France, 2003. Photo: Andrea Mantovani for the *New York Times*.

The statue of Black military hero General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas was destroyed by Nazis when they occupied Paris. Recently, a statue honoring his son's foil, the revered white writer Victor Hugo, was also subjected to racial violence. Initially a source of pride for the city of Besançon, the 2002 sculpture was created by the renowned Black Senegalese sculptor Ousmane Sow. After the statue's 2022 restoration, its slightly darker coloration was denounced as transforming the white literary giant into a Black man, and led to multiple acts of defacement.

More insidiously, conservatives such as Xavier-Laurent Salvador argued that a “race-centered view [was] perverting the country’s traditional universalist view where race and color are considered irrelevant.” This exhibition attempts to challenge such virulent denials of France’s racist, race-conscious colonial history. A friend of Sow stated, “Colors were part of his identity.” They are also part of his art—and France’s history.