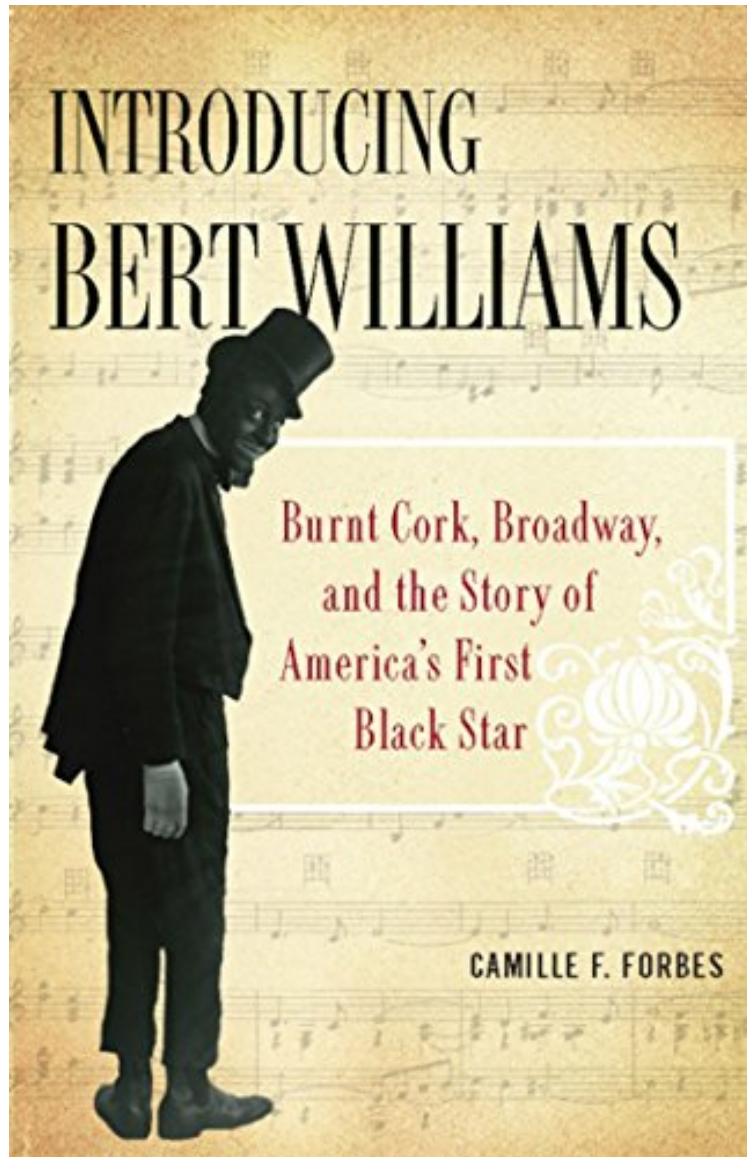


(Mobile book) Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star

## Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star

*Camille F. Forbes*

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**Camille F. Forbes : Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Lively Readable Prose Resurrects a Forgotten Formidable GeniusBy

Arthur W. CampbellForbes' thoroughly documented story of the "greatest comedian on the American stage" delivers the most sensitive, nuanced, and contextualized biography I've ever read. Savoring the author's spirited syntax, the reader is transported to periods and places in American life largely ignored by conventional historians. Not only does the author portray the extraordinary life of this talented, tortured, and misunderstood genius, she does so while illuminating the political and cultural times in which Bert Williams lived. In so doing Forbes' has made an additional contribution to scholarship: She has crafted a compellingly original history of show business in America. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A lengthy introduction . . . By Mark S. Crawford "Introducing Bert Williams" was, to me, a rather lengthy read as an introduction. The book wasn't as biographical about Williams the person, as it was about Williams the performer. I retained three main themes; 1) Williams was universally praised as an outstanding comedian, 2) he was timid, passive, and lacked the assertiveness his partner, George Walker, possessed, and 3) he was uncomfortable speaking for his race. These themes are well researched and supported and presented many times over - almost in every chapter. In addition, each chapter included many detailed accounts of shows, reactions, song lyrics, and back stories of people and events. There were sometimes so many details and explanations that it was distracting and I had to remind myself the subject of the book. For me, what was missing was insight to the man himself. His childhood is mentioned, but its inclusion seems obligatory. His personal life as an adult is scantily mentioned. It was a lengthy read for so few high points - of which succinct details can be found on the Internet. To be commentary about a man of the theater, there was no drama, no climax, no pathos. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I so enjoyed this book the history of theatre By Barbara E. Klag I so enjoyed this book the history of theatre. Bert Williams has been somewhat mislabeled by African America, but he survived became one of the stars of Broadway "Negro" Theatre of the time. He was such a positive role model for all in his generosity acting style. Well packaged for safe delivery. Thank You. bk

According to critics of his time, Bert Williams was the Greatest Comedian on the American Stage. A black Bahamian immigrant, Williams made his start as a barker advertising the rough-and-tumble medicine shows that dotted the Wild West at the end of the nineteenth century. Not long after joining a minstrel troupe and donning the burnt-cork makeup of blackface, he teamed up with African American George Walker in a sixteen-year partnership that would take them from rural western mining towns to the bright lights of Broadway. In *Introducing Bert Williams*, historian Camille Forbes reveals a fascinating figure, initiating the reader into the vivid world of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular entertainment. Williams's long and varied career is a whirlwind of drama, glamour, and ambition nothing less than the birth of American show business.

From Publishers Weekly Once billed as The Funniest Man on Earth, black comedian Bert Williams (1874–1922), in the midst of a current revival (e.g., Louis Chude-Sokei's *The Last Darky* and Caryl Phillips's *Dancing in the Dark*), gets solidly covered by Forbes, a UC San Diego professor of African-American literature and culture. She delivers an in-depth documentation of his life set against the shadowy backdrop of 19th and 20th-century racism. Working within the limitations of blackface stereotypes, Williams regaled audiences with his creative characterizations. Born in the Bahamas, he was schooled in California, joining medicine shows and minstrel troupes before teaming with George Walker for vaudeville and Victor recordings. Williams's woeful *Nobody* became his signature theme song, and in 1903, he brought the first black musical to Broadway. When Ziegfeld ignored protests and cast Williams in 1910, his integrated *Ziegfeld Follies* became a theatrical milestone. Williams had shown that blacks who break through to 'The Great White Way' can triumph and stay. Forbes's foray through the Billy Rose Theatre Collection and other archives fills 52 pages of bibliographic notes, and her vivid, detailed descriptions of Williams's comedy routines bring his dynamic stage presence to life on the page. (Jan. 29) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Henry Louis Gates Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University "Camille F. Forbes has produced a history not only of a life and an industry, but also of our ideas about the performance and theatricality of race itself. This is a significant contribution to the field of African-American Studies as well as a model of how to pull a story out of archives and historical records that do not always cooperate." David Jasen, author of *The American Rag: The Story of Ragtime from Coast to Coast and Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History* "This book combines the fascinating biography of Bert Williams with the enriched history of blacks in American show business. Camille Forbes does a wonderful job of displaying her research on his life as she recreates the atmosphere of the years during which Williams flourished. It is a welcome addition to my personal library."