

***An African in Imperial London:
The Indomitable Life of A.B.C. Merriman-Labor***

By Danell Jones

Publisher: Hurst/Oxford University Press

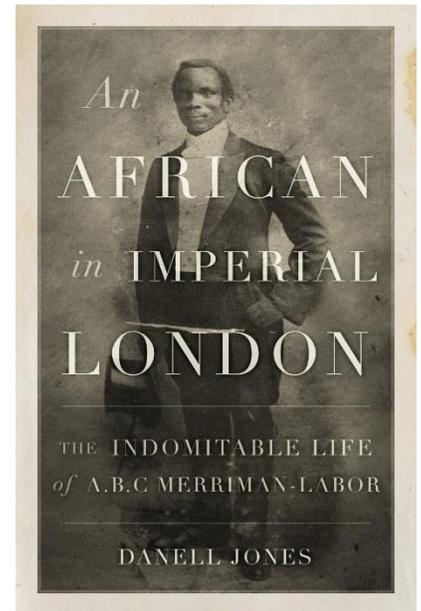
Publishing Date: September 2018

ISBN-13: 978-1849049603

RRP: \$34.95

Page count: 320 pages

Genre: Biography/Cultural History



WINNER

2019 High Plains Book Award for Nonfiction

At the turn of the 20th century, London was the largest city on earth. The heart and brain of the biggest empire the world had ever known, governing the lives and fortunes of some 34 million Africans. The writer A.B.C. Merriman-Labor was one of them. He moved to the great metropolis in 1904, determined to take his place on the world's greatest literary stage. His satirical book about life in London, *Britons Through Negro Spectacles*, written in 1909, is one of the most fascinating books you've never heard of.

In this first biography of Merriman-Labor, Danell Jones describes the tragic spiral that pulled him down the social ladder from writer and barrister to munitions worker, from witty observer of the social order to patient in a state-run hospital for the poor. In restoring this extraordinary man to the pantheon of African observers of colonialism, Jones opens a window onto racial attitudes in Edwardian London. Discover the hidden history of Africans living at the heart of empire and learn the fascinating true story of a man who faced discrimination, poverty, and world war, but never gave up his dream of making a difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danell Jones is an award-winning writer, scholar, and teacher. She received her Ph.D. from Columbia University where she was awarded a Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities and a Bennett Cerf Award for her writing. She is the author of *An Africa in Imperial London: The Indomitable Life of A.B.C. Merriman-Labor*, *The Virginia Woolf Writers' Workshop*, and *Desert Elegy*.

Website: danelljones.com
<https://www.facebook.com/danell.jones>
<https://www.instagram.com/danell>

AGENT

Jon Curzon
Artellus Limited
30 Dorset House, Gloucester Place, London

NW1 5AD
44 (0) 20 7935 6972

PRAISE FOR

An African in Imperial London

Marvelously readable!

Corby Skinner, Yellowstone Public Radio

A brilliant biography . . . [Jones] has given a vivid picture of London one hundred years ago.

Jacqueline Mulhallen, Counterfire

A must read.

The Sierra Leone Telegraph

Written with great verve, *An African in Imperial London* is an enlightening account of what it meant to be black in the most powerful country in the world.

Peter Stansky, Stanford University

The moving and surprising story of A.B.C. Merriman-Labor.

Edward Mendelson, Columbia University

Elegantly written and meticulously researched for over seven years, this is an important addition to the history of Africans in Britain.

Hakim Adi, University of Chichester

A deep sense of humanity pervades this splendid biography.

David Killingray, University of London

Q & A

Who was A.B.C. Merriman-Labor?

Augustus Boyle Chamberlayne Merriman-Labor was a British-educated African writer from Sierra Leone who moved to London in 1904 to pursue a literary career in the heart of empire. Although he was at the vanguard of African literature, his life and works have almost vanished from our historical and literary memory. *An African in Imperial London* explores the challenges he and other people of color faced at the time and portrays the captivating world of early 20th-century London, a giant city shaped by suffragettes and motorcars, dandies and beggars as well as a devastating flu epidemic and the ravages of World War I.

Why is he important?

Merriman-Labor's *Britons Through Negro Spectacles* (1909), a witty satire of life in London, is one of the most fascinating books you've never heard of. Its premise is both simple and outrageous: what happens when an African inspects Britain in much the same way Britons had been inspecting Africa for centuries? The answer turned the colonial view of the world on its head. Looked at through African eyes, it turns out that Great Britain was a fascinating, dangerous place, full of exotic people, strange customs, and bizarre practices.

Did London impress Merriman-Labor?

Merriman-Labor found it a remarkable place. He was enchanted by the wonderful technology—electric trams, telephones, and sky-scraping buildings some fourteen stories high. He had been taught to see London as a place of sophistication and opportunity, and in many ways it was. He loved the incredible educational opportunities available to him there: museums, botanical gardens, exhibitions, and, of course, the British Library. But it also posed enormous challenges for a black man seeking recognition for his talents.

What surprised him about London?

At the time, London was both the biggest city in the world and the heart and brain of the world's biggest empire. But Merriman-Labor was deeply troubled by the dire poverty in such a wealthy metropolis. He describes with horror the sight of an emancipated woman holding a baby in her arms. She has a note pinned to her tattered clothes that reads: "Kind friend, have pity. I am the mother of eighteen, all starving." He knew first-hand the difficulty of finding work. Despite his years as a clerk in Sierra Leone, he was unable to find a job. Ultimately, he developed an Afrocentric import/export business to keep him afloat while he studied law and pursued his research and writing.

Why will his story be interesting to readers?

An African in Imperial London reveals a slice of British life that readers have never seen before. It is also an inspiring story. Merriman-Labor faced injustice, illness, and even a catastrophic world war and never gave up his dream of writing books that would change the way the world looked at Africa. Undaunted by failure or prejudice, he stands as a hero for anyone who has ever aspired despite lack of recognition or reward.



SAMPLE OF RECENT APPEARANCES

RADIO & PODCAST INTERVIEWS

Resounds: Arts and Culture on the High Plains, September 10, 2018

Historically Thinking, Episode 104, March 27, 2019

READINGS

UK

Britain and the World Conference, Exeter, England, June 21, 2018.

Wimpole History Festival, Cambridge, England, June 22, 2018

African Writes, British Library, London, England, June 30, 2018

Bradford Literary Festival, Bradford, England, July 1, 2018

US

Billings Public Library, Billings, MT, September 5, 2018

Art House Cinema, Billings, MT September 11, 2018

Rocky Mountain College, Billings, MT, September 17, 2018

Montana Festival of the Book, Missoula, MT September 29, 2018

Western Heritage Center, Billings, MT, November 11, 2018

American Association of University Women, Billings, MT, December 8, 2018

High Plains Book Festival, October 2019

BOOK TRAILER

