CREATING A “RESTLESS POPULATION”: MYRTILLA MINER AND HER LEGACY ON PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN WASHINGTON, DC

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CREATING A “RESTLESS POPULATION”: MYRTILLA MINER AND HER LEGACY ON PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN WASHINGTON, DC

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ABSTRACT

This senior thesis explores the way in which individuals build institutions, and in turn institutions build the legacy and the narrative surrounding that individual. This thesis uses the University of the District of Columbia as a case study for this phenomenon. A simple observation of the University of the District of Columbia website’s History page will give one an overview of how, starting from a small, six-student Normal School for Colored Girls, UDC took the path to become the institution that it is today. While informative, this does little to tell the story of the institution’s founder, Miss Myrtilla Miner, and how her story has been used over time. While several articles, and some chapters of a few books detail Miner’s early life, there is nothing written on how her memory has changed and has been used throughout history. UDC as it exists today did not start as this Normal School, but was created through a series of mergers, yet they still hold close to Miner as their founder. Thus, UDC serves as an example of how institutions selectively craft their image.

In order to see how UDC and its predecessor institutions have adapted Miss Miner’s image to a certain agenda, I analyzed a variety of sources, including some of Miner’s actual handwritten correspondences, newspaper articles from the 1850’s, documents from the 1951 centennial celebration of Miner Teachers College, and an observation of the 2017 Founder’s Day Celebration. While analyzing these sources, I take a particular focus on three time periods: the 1850’s when Miner is first starting her school; 1951, or the centennial of Miner’s school; and the 21st century.
What I have observed is that in each of these time periods, Miner’s narrative is used in a very different way. Even more importantly, after the founding of UDC in 1976, and several years of decline, the university took up Miner’s memory in 2004 as they tried to reshape their institution into one with a rich legacy.

What this thesis concludes is that, as hypothesized, Miner’s narrative was shaped depending on the cultural and historical time period, as well as the politics of whatever institution Miner’s school existed as during that time. Additionally, while Miner put in the initial effort to create an institution, over time UDC as an institution has built upon Miner’s memory and image.
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INTRODUCTION

While petitioning for the funds to start a teacher-training school for African American girls, then-DC Mayor Walter Lenox told a weak, yet eager Myrtilla Miner that there was no point and she was ignorant of the colored population. In an article published in the *National Intelligencer*, he noted that by educating these African Americans, Miner would be creating a “restless population” whose educational abilities will exceed their economic opportunities.¹ Mayor Lenox’s reasoning for opposition were four-fold: the school would attract free colored people to the District from adjoining states, the school was proposed to give these free colored people an education far beyond what their political and social condition would justify, the school would be a center of influence directed against the existence of slavery in the District, and it might endanger the institution of slavery and even render asunder the Union.² Despite this opposition, and other obstacles that Miner faced, she was determined to fulfill what she saw as her life purpose, which was to make every slave a man, and every man free through education.³ Thus, on December 6th 1851, in a small rented room with six pupils, Myrtilla Miner established the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls, which was the first normal school of this kind in the District, and the fourth in the nation.⁴

In this thesis I argue that while Myrtilla Miner created her Normal School for Colored Girls in 1851, after over 150 years and a series of mergers later, the University of the District of Columbia resurrected Miner’s image as their institutional hero to connect them to a rich,

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² Wormley, “Myrtilla Miner,” 452.
³ Wormley, “Myrtilla Miner,” 452.
⁴ Wormley, “Myrtilla Miner,” 453.
progressive history. Through this thesis, I hope the reader will gain a deeper understanding of the politics of memory through the use of Myrtilla Miner as lens into this broader theme. This thesis aims to reveal the ways in which gender, race, and social capital played into the formation of the collective memory of Myrtilla Miner as a pioneer of public higher education in Washington, DC, as well as how memory is constantly shifting and being re-membered. In addition, the reader will begin to gain a broader understanding of the history of higher education in DC and in the nation.

This work contributes to a body of knowledge that has yet to expand; as a quick search of scholarly journal articles and books on Myrtilla Miner reveals that not only is there little written on her, but writings on her often do little analysis other than recounting her history and the challenges she faced towards opening her school. Additionally, the most recent published article about Miner was in 2002, and the most recent book dedicating a substantial portion to Miner was published in 1986.\(^5\)\(^6\) Evidently, scholars have not revisited Miner and her work lately, and with the changes UDC has gone through even in the last 30 years, I saw an opening to pursue new research on the institution and on Miner. With UDC’s unique position as the only urban land grant institution in the nation, as well as its separation from its focus on solely educating an African American population while still holding a formal designation amongst the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), there are a lot of historical and cultural factors left to analyze the emergence and proliferation of this institution, particularly its ability to survive through the Civil War era.\(^7\)


I. Methodology

For this thesis, I retrieved the majority of my primary research from archival material. Washington, DC has several locations that hold archives from the District of Columbia Public School system, including the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, the Historical Society of Washington, DC, the Library of Congress, and data collected from Georgetown University Lauinger library and consortium.

Through these primary sources, I was able to gain an understanding of the education atmosphere during the mid-1800’s in DC, particularly for young African Americans. This was an interesting period in DC history: there was a substantial amount of free African Americans in the District, essentially unable to work and also unable to become educated. Subsequently, while the Emancipation Proclamation declaring the end of slavery did not include any legislature about the schooling of the free slaves, it also did not include anything against educating freed slaves. One of the primary sources I will looked at is newspapers discussing early schools set up to educate African Americans, through which I was able to gain a sense of the tension present from those who were against educating freed slaves. I conducted research at the Myrtilla Miner papers, located in the Library of Congress. These papers hold the letters Miner wrote to abolitionists in the North while fundraising to create her school as well as correspondences with friends and family. From this archival data, I tried to gain a sense of how Miner portrayed herself and how other people perceived Miner during her lifetime. While analyzing Miner’s letter correspondences to friends, I made note of Miner’s initial reasons for starting her school. I specifically wanted to know why and how she convinced her friends and family that this was her life mission, and whether or not she received support. When analyzing letters to potential funders, I looked closely at the reasons she gave to convince others to fund her school. I also
used these papers to gain a sense of her educational philosophy and trace how the idea to create a teacher-training program developed.

For the memory aspects of my thesis, I focused on two specific time periods: the Miner Normal School Centennial Anniversary, and Founders Day Celebrations following the incorporation of UDC in 1976. My primary source data from this portion came from my attendance at the 2017 Founders Day Celebration. While at this celebration, I paid close attention to the ways that UDC administrators described Myrtilla Miner, and if the current mission of UDC compared with Miner’s original mission for her Normal School for Colored Girls. To analyze the years prior to this year’s celebration, I analyzed UDC’s website archives and Youtube videos of past Founders Day celebrations. Additionally, as a key aspect to my thesis, I analyzed Washington, DC newspapers during the time of UDC’s incorporation to see the response to the creation of this university, as well as to see whether or not Myrtilla Miner’s image was used or mentioned in these foundational years.

II. Literature Review

The current literature in the field I am researching gives information about the pioneers of early public education, in the context of the segregated nature of the District of Columbia. However, very few articles look specifically into how certain figures are remembered today, and how the memory of them changes over time. As a result, most of the articles I used for my Literature Review either give an overview of pioneers in public education as a whole, or look specifically into Myrtilla Miner and her impact in education at the time. Thus, where I am contributing is by bringing Myrtilla Miner into conversation in the 21st century. Specifically,
how is she remembered, and how did her race and gender play into the way her story was told throughout history?

To date, only one person has written a book solely about Miner’s life and legacy. That book is entitled *Myrtilla Miner: A Memoir*, and was written by Ellen O’Connor in 1885, then-Secretary of the Institute for the Education of Colored Youth, and a personal friend of Myrtilla Miner. Of the other published works on Miner’s life, most, if not all, enter into the same conversation. Almost every text heavily cites O’Connor’s memoir, and the rest typically cite each other. This concept, which will be explained further later in this thesis, is really important because it speaks to the way memory is preserved. If each of the texts throughout history use the same sources to tell Miner’s story, then naturally they do not deviate much from a given storyline. And, if they do deviate from each other, it speaks to the ways in which certain facts are either forgotten or changed over time.

The journal article “Myrtilla Miner’s ‘School for Colored Girls’: A Mirror on Antebellum Washington,” written by Druscilla Null, helps to situate my project in larger social movements. Null acknowledges that Myrtilla Miner was linked to both the feminist and abolitionist movements. This may give a broader cultural understanding of why people talked about Miner in the way they did. At the core of her desire was for “something more congenial,” a feeling many women at the time possessed, which lent to a desire for equal educational opportunities and shaped the women’s rights movement.  

8 This could help support a conclusion that while other writings on the school at the time seemed to see the African American students as “others,”

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Miner possessed a deep passion for equality amongst women and men, and for black women in particular.

The only other book that gives a great deal of analysis to Miner’s life and legacy is *Three Who Dared: Prudence Crandall, Margaret Douglass, Myrtilla Miner—Champions of Antebellum Black Education* by Philip S. Foner and Josephine F. Pacheco. The book focuses on schools for African Americans created by white women in antebellum America, devoting a section each to Prudence Crandall of Connecticut, Margaret Douglass of Norfolk, VA, and Myrtilla Miner. In the introduction the authors note that of the three women, Miner’s is the only school that remained permanent. While each of the chapters are mutually exclusive, the authors use the introduction as a way to analyze the three women in relation to each other. Through this analysis, one can get a unique perspective that the works of other authors do not touch on. For example, the authors note that with the increase in availability of education for women opened up the possibility for women to enter the professional world through teaching. While many women saw this as the “feminization” of the profession, Miner saw opening a school as a way to assert her independence and to express her self-assurance.9 Through the introduction, one main theme emerges: the racial barriers these three women had to overcome to create their schools. The authors note that while the South intentionally made it difficult for blacks to learn to read, the North and Midwest had little concern for the education of blacks “because they did not belong to the body politic.” Despite this, the authors note that the concept of morality was the one motive for educating blacks, whether free or enslaved. This is the motivation that drove all three women in the text.

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9 Foner and Pacheco, xiii.
Similar to the introduction of *Three Who Dared*, in his discussion of Miner in *The American Negro: His History and Literature*, Carter G. Woodson does not initially explicitly mention that Miner is white. Instead, it is implied. Consider the following statement: “After various discouragements in seeking a special preparation for life’s work, she finally concluded that she should devote her time to the moral and intellectual improvement of the Negroes.” This sentence follows Woodson’s introduction of Miner as “a worthy young woman of New York” who initiated the movement for the higher education of African Americans in Washington, DC.

The Report of the Board of Education to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1904-1905 does a great job explaining the importance of historical memory. After acknowledging that the authors of the report borrowed most of their facts from O’Connor’s *Memoir*, they state: “The world counts it a duty to hold aloft to the general gaze of succeeding generations famous characters, men and women, at times in eclipse in the rush and crush of new events and interests.”

This aside not only justifies the author’s use of a previous text, but also further highlights the importance of this thesis on securing generational memory. Furthermore, the role of history and literature is to embalm “genius and extraordinary services” in history, with subsequent contributions keeping them “fresh in immortal youth, exempt from mutability and decay.” This is why my thesis is important. It seeks to continue and revitalize a key figure in American history. Through my research methods, I am adding a fresh, modern perspective on the life and legacy of Myrtilla Miner. By using methods characteristic of the interdisciplinary American Studies field, I am able to revisit the history while also revealing the way that gender, race, and social capital also shaped Miner’s ability to be solidified in American history.

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This thesis will begin by giving a brief history of education for African Americans in the United States, then the following three chapters will be a comparative analysis of the ways in which Miner’s legacy is used and changed over time. After that, this thesis will explore the importance of institutional memory, and conclude with possibility for future research.
Chapter 1: Brief History of Education for African Americans

“To the colored citizens of the city of Washington would I gladly feel myself commissioned to bear messages of love, of purity & peace, as a faithful teacher—destitute of those peculiar prejudices which afflict most of my race, & too well worn in sorrow, to fear public scorn or contempt.” —Myrtilla Miner

Understanding a brief history of education for African Americans in the United States will situate Myrtilla Miner’s efforts in a historical context. The history of education for African Americans extends back to the arrival of African slaves in North America. Aside from being educated in modern civilization and in the language of their owners, slave owners questioned if, and to what extent, their slaves should receive any type of formal training. Considering that “not a few masters maintained that the more brutish the bondmen the more pliant they become for purposes of exploitation,” the majority of southerners determined that slaves should not be educated.12 Out of fear that an enlightened mind would clearly see the immorality of the slave system, and later on segregation, racist whites used this rationale to deprive African Americans of the right to an education, the consequences of which can still be seen in our education system today.

According to Carter G. Woodson in The American Negro: The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861, antebellum education for African Americans falls into two different periods: the first period ranging from the introduction of slavery to the insurrectionary movement in 1835, and the period where the industrial revolution changed slavery from a patriarchal to an economic institution.13 During the first period, there were three different types of advocates for African Americans

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13 Woodson, 2.
American education: masters who wanted to “increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply,” whites why sympathized with the oppressed nature of the slaves; and missionaries who taught the slaves English so they could learn the principles of Christianity.\textsuperscript{14} Woodson credits the Spanish and French missionaries as the first to attempt to tackle the issue related to African American education, and thus setting an example that influenced African American education throughout the nation. While many of these initial efforts to spread Catholicism focused solely on Native Americans—especially since they advocated for the enslavement of the African American—the desire to see “uncivilized” people in church ultimately overcame this and they began to teach slaves, providing instruction for the mixed-breed offspring of slaves and their masters, and provided freed slaves with educational privileges of the highest class.\textsuperscript{15} In response to this, the Bishop of London declared that a Christian could not be held as a slave. As a result of this, the missionaries of the Church of England undertook the role of educating slaves for the purpose of proselytizing.\textsuperscript{16}

Quakers, however, were the first settlers in the American colonies to offer slaves the same educational and religious privileges that members of their own race were provided. However, these early efforts were not sustained. It was not until after 1760 that American society faced a shift in the view of African American men in particular. As society saw a rise in manumission and emancipation, religious communities began to open schools, missions, and churches to educate the newly freed black men. African American educational attainment rapidly expanded. Along with the attainment of education came the dispelling of the myth that African

\textsuperscript{14} Woodson, 2.
\textsuperscript{15} Woodson, 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Woodson, 4.
Americans were mentally inferior to whites, and African Americans began to write poetry and contribute to mathematics, science, philosophy, and many even became employed to teach white children.\textsuperscript{17} Along with all of these advances, one question remained: whether or not schools should be set up to educate these freed African Americans.

Throughout the nation, and especially throughout the South, legislation was created to prohibit educating slaves beginning in South Carolina in 1740, under the belief that “if they are to remain in slavery they should be kept in the lowest state of ignorance and degradation, and the nearer you bring them to the condition of brutes the better chance they have to retain their apathy.”\textsuperscript{18} Thus, it became both a crime to set up schools to educate slaves, as well as illegal for slaves to teach their own children.\textsuperscript{19} However, legislation did not diminish the urge for slaves to be educated, for free African Americans to attempt to educate slaves, nor for compassionate whites to instruct slaves and freed African Americans primarily through Christianity. Through teaching a rudimentary education, Christian thought could be conveyed, allowing some slaves to gain the ability to read and write, which ultimately led to members of the race desiring more education.\textsuperscript{20}

During the 1830 Convention of Free People of Color, William Lloyd Garrison stated the following:

An ignorant people can never occupy any other than a degraded place in society; they can never be truly free until they are intelligent. It is an old maxim that knowledge is power; and . . . rank, wealth, dignity, and protection. That capital brings highest return to a city, state, or nation . . . which is invested in schools, academies, and colleges. If I had

\textsuperscript{17} Woodson, 6.

\textsuperscript{18} Woodson, 9.

\textsuperscript{19} Woodson, 9.

\textsuperscript{20} Woodson, 12.
children, rather than that they should grow up in ignorance, I would feed them upon bread and water: I would sell my teeth, or extract the blood from my veins.\textsuperscript{21}

Garrison’s sentiments resonated with many African Americans at this time, and the issue of restricting education for blacks only made the desire for education even stronger as the population of African Americans began to grow. In 1810, there were 1,377,808 African Americans in the United States. By 1890, this number has more than quintupled to 7,470,000. Considering this rapid growth in the African American population, the 1901 Report of the United States Commissioner of Education “suggests the wisdom of immediate action, in so far as the problem will yield to ascertained methods of treatment.”\textsuperscript{22} Essentially, they recognized the immediate need to educate this still-growing population; an immediate need that Miner noticed over a half-century prior to this Report, which stated that her “memory is certainly held precious in the hearts of her throngs of pupils, in the hearts of the colored people of the District, and of all who took knowledge of her life and who reverence the cause in which she offered herself a willing sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{23}

This very brief outline of the history of education for African Americans reminds the reader that the debate of whether and to what extent slaves should be educated expands back much further than Myrtilla Miner’s young life. This historical outline sets the background of Myrtilla Miner’s role in the history of African American education. Naturally, she was not the first person to attempt to tackle this issue, she was not the only, and she definitely was not the last. However, this background situates her efforts within this timeframe, especially considering

\begin{enumerate}
\item Annual Report of Commissioner of Education, 57th Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., 1901, H.doc.5/35, serial 4300, 735.
\item Special Report of the Commissioner of Education on the Condition and Improvement of Public Schools in the District of Columbia, 41\textsuperscript{st} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{d} sess., 1870, E.exdoc.315, serial 1427, 210.
\end{enumerate}
that Miner spearheaded her school before Emancipation. In my research, there is no evidence that Miner took any stance on whether she saw education as a means to make man a better moral agent, or for the purposes of technical training among the masses. However, through her teacher-training model, she sought a way to ensure her educational efforts would reach far beyond the pupils she taught in her schoolhouse.

\[24\] Harris, 100.
Chapter 2: Who Was Miss Miner?

“If God hath not sent me to this work, I hope he will raise up the means to defeat me in all my purposes; and if it is his work, and he has permitted me to be the instrument of its commencement, no man or men can frustrate the design, and all their efforts will prove unavailing.”—Myrtilla Miner

Myrtilla Miner, often regarded as a pioneer of education and given credit for beginning the teacher-training movement in Washington, DC, was a “brave little woman” who in 1851 founded the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls in Washington, DC, the first institution of higher education for African American women in the District of Columbia. A white northern women born into a poor family in New York, Miner suffered through illness through the entirety of her forty-nine years of life, yet did not let her condition stand in the way of her passion for education. From a young age she displayed strong will and determination to achieve whatever goals she set, with the largest and most important being her teacher-training school for free African American women. Myrtilla Miner made it her life mission to work towards the accessibility of education for African Americans in general, by focusing particularly on African American women.

One can identify four main reasons for dedicating her life to the accessibility of education: growing up in a poor family, she realized that education was the only way to lift herself out of her economic condition; she was the product of her environment: the northern educational influences shaped her view of what education should do; she truly empathized with the dreadful African American situation instead of just promoting an abolitionist agenda that


26 Foner and Pacheco, 101.
called for immediate emancipation; and as a deeply religious woman, she believed it was God’s plan for her to complete. Thus, the structure of this chapter will be as follows: a brief introduction to Miner’s life and upbringing, followed by a closer analysis of the four aspects of Miner’s character that made her committed to the accessibility of education.

Born March 4th, 1815 in Brookfield, Madison County, New York to a family of poor farmers, Myrtilla Miner was destined to “accomplish important work in an untried field with the handicap of severe physical deficiencies.”

Miner’s parents raised her and her twelve siblings with strong religious convictions, yet with little schooling because of their father’s belief that education beyond a certain level was “superfluous and unnecessary.” Despite having only a few years of formal schooling, Miner desired to attain more knowledge. Because she was ill through much of her childhood, she often turned to books and learning as a source of solace, and was determined to attain a higher level of education. Aiming to satisfy this desire, at a young age Miner sent a letter to then-Governor of the State of New York William H. Seward, asking for advice for a young woman seeking higher education.

Recognizing at a young age that there were few opportunities for women, she hoped that by bringing the issue up to someone in a position of power, it could possibly become an issue the government takes up. However, in the Governor’s response, he stated: “While I do not doubt that the policy of the State in that respect (in regard to the education of women) might be improved I perceive with much pleasure that it is


28 O’Connor, 10.

accomplishing much more than has heretofore been anticipated.”

Despite the Governor’s vague and hopeless response, Miner still sought a way to accomplish her God-given purpose.

Miner’s early determination in the face of both physical and societal obstacles form the base of her characterization as a morally strong woman willing to make sacrifices in pursuit of what she saw as morally correct. O’Connor, and subsequent writings on her life, often emphasize these early years of her life, perhaps as a way to shape the view of Miner as a woman literally born to sacrifice her life in the name of educating the African American race. After receiving the Governor’s response, Miner set out with a plan to fulfill her goals. As a teenager, Miner joined her family picking hops on the farm, undeterred by her frailness, hoping to make enough money to pay her way through higher education. From working, Miner was able to raise seventeen dollars to begin saving up for her education. Then, at around age sixteen, Miner began teaching in a school near her home, while simultaneously attending the Young Ladies Domestic Seminary at Clinton, Oneida County, New York. Admitted under the condition of holding her tuition payments until after earning them by teaching, O’Connor notes how it must have been “pathetic to see this young, frail girl, with her pale face and lustrous eyes, pleading for an entrance to the halls of learning.” Yet, the principal must have accepted her plea on the account of Miner’s evident energy and determination, an important characteristic that would carry her through her subsequent school proposals. However, shortly after beginning, her health once again began to

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30 Wells, 361.
31 Anglim, 1.
32 Wells, 361.
33 O’Connor, 12.
34 O’Connor, 12-13.
fail and Miner was forced to leave the school. After taking a brief leave of absence to recuperate at home, in 1842 she moved to Rochester to teach at Clover Street Academy.

From this brief introduction to Miner’s life, this chapter will now delve deeper into four integral elements that shaped Miner’s life mission of providing accessible education for African Americans.

I.

Before even realizing it was her life mission to create a school for the training of African American women, Miner came to realize that, for certain groups of people, education was inaccessible. Growing up in a poor in a family with twelve kids, she had an intense passion for reading and learning. However, there were a few factors that stood in her way of formal education. First and foremost, as previously mentioned, Miner was sick through most of her childhood and was often confined to bed. Miner’s grandmother, who lived with her family, paid extra attention to the young girl, frequently telling her stories of her own childhood and entertaining her in whatever way she could. In a letter to her father, Miner later admitted that “[L]ittle did my…father think…that those…days & nights when she [his daughter] seemed to be learning nothing, she was imbibing the principles of independent action, that were to take her from her home & friends & make her a wanderer through life.”\textsuperscript{35} These early days instilled in Miner a desire for education, and shaped her own determined and independent nature.

When she was healthy enough to attend school, she had to trek a half mile from her home on a poorly constructed, semi-mountainous route where she often slipped and fell. Aside from the physical difficulty of getting to school, Miner came from a poor family of twelve kids, and

\textsuperscript{35} Foner and Pacheco, 100.
her parents did not have the financial means to send their kids to schooling beyond the district school level. Additionally, Miner’s father simply did not believe in the usefulness in education beyond learning the basics. It was at this point in her life that Miner initially sent a letter to New York Governor William H. Seward addressing the lack of higher education options for women, and received his disheartening response. With the odds stacked against her, Miner relied on her independence and determination that she developed early in life to come up with and pursue her plan to attain higher education. 

II.

Miner’s commitment to accessibility of education extended beyond her own personal beliefs. She was the product of her environment: the feminist and abolitionist movements made her aware of societal oppression, while northern educational influences shaped her view of what education could do for oppressed populations.

The Young Ladies Domestic Seminary that Miner attended made up one of the few institutions for women that arose in the north, indicating at least some progress in the fight for equal rights. According to Null, Miner’s search for “something more congenial” was characteristic of several women during this time, as this was the beginning of the women’s rights crusade. It was during this time at the Seminary that Miner began another correspondence with Governor William H. Seward, as previously mentioned. In addition to the response mentioned earlier, he also thanked Miner for “submitting your very just views of the importance of more equal measures in regard to the education of women.”

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36 Foner and Pacheco 100.
37 Null, 256.
38 Null, 256.
she had hoped, Miner clearly still believed that she did not have to accept things the way they were.

This view was solidified when, in 1845, her cousin secured her a position in Providence, Rhode Island public schools. In this position, Miner served under Henry Barnard, the “scholar of the educational awakening” during the antebellum period.³⁹ Under his tutelage, Miner benefitted from a series of town libraries and a traveling model school to demonstrate the art of teaching.⁴⁰ In addition, Miner’s educational standards for the training of African American teachers were most likely shaped by the important educators active during the mid-19th century. Horace Mann, often considered the “Father of Normal Schools” contributed to the founding of her Normal School for Colored Girls. Mann’s wife, Mary Peabody Mann, also contributed to the school by lecturing to the students during the time her husband served in Congress. Miner was also close friends with the Stowe family, a prominent northern abolitionist family. Calvin E. Stowe became a member of the Board of Trustees, and Harriet Beecher Stowe contributed funds from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to support Miner’s school. While research has failed to find a direct link between Miner and these influential abolitionists, her manner of teaching reflects the educational procedures that Catherine Beecher, Calvin Stowe, Henry Barnard, and Horace Mann all advocated for.⁴¹ From being surrounded by so many key figures in education history, Miner was able to attain the resources and the moral support to pursue her goal towards education attainment.

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⁴⁰ Daniel, 32.

⁴¹ Daniel, 38.
As a young woman coming into adulthood at the height of the feminist and abolitionist movements, from an early age Myrtilla Miner came to the understanding that education was necessary for lifting oppressed populations out of their situations. Immediately upon discouragement from her boss in Mississippi when she proposed educating the slaves on the plantation, Miner “resolved to open a normal school for Colored youth.”42 She came to this resolve “under the stirring impression that Northern people should exert themselves to elevate permanently the colored people of the free states.”43 While her time in Mississippi solidified her plans to create a school for African American children, after realizing the link between the condition of slaves and the condition of women, she narrowed her focus to creating “a genteel school for missus of color.”44 Under this model—in which she would train African American teachers who could then teach young black students—Miner believed that “the crime and wrong of slavery might be reached.”45 As late as 1850, Miner still had no idea what type of school she would create; she just knew it was her life’s mission to create one. And, while she did not know what type of school it would be, she knew that she had a certain privilege as a woman to be the person to undertake this mission, as demonstrated in the following quote: “No man can fill the station, because men may be attacked by men and driven from their posts, but a woman claims lenity from her weakness and may not be harmed.”46

42 Miner, Myrtilla.

43 Container 2 Reel 2

44 Null, 258.


One could consider that, while creating the opportunities for African American women to train to enter into a career, Miner Normal Schools’ narrow focus also illustrate the limitations placed on women in society. Because teaching was essentially the only career option for women, it showed that the feminist movement needed to go even further. Essential to Miner’s school was the belief that training women to teach would “fulfill one of their natural roles, that of teacher.”\(^\text{47}\) She specifically believed that “through the influence of educated colored women she could lay the solid foundations for the disenthralment of their race.”\(^\text{48}\) The *Historical Sketch of Education for the Colored Race in the District of Columbia, 1807-1905*, explains this reasoning even further: “Behind the splendid manhood of America is her grand womanhood.”\(^\text{49}\) Even more specifically, “the babe nursed by one whose mind and heart were opened, who felt freedom, could not be kept or made a slave.”\(^\text{50}\) While Winfield Scott Montgomery wrote this explanation long after the opening of Miner’s school, this explanation for why Miner chose to train women reveals the deeply gendered view that woman’s role in society was to “create and maintain the spirit of liberty.”\(^\text{51}\) Additionally, one can witness Miner’s acknowledgement of her own limitation in a career choice when she half-jokingly tells a friend she was considering studying medicine as her vocation, to which her friend relies: “one Miss [Elizabeth] Blackwell will be quite sufficient for this 19th century.”\(^\text{52}\) Nineteenth century society limited women to specific

\(^{47}\) Null, 259.  
\(^{48}\) Special Report to the Commissioner of Education, 207.  
\(^{50}\) Montgomery, 36.  
\(^{51}\) Montgomery, 36.  
\(^{52}\) Null, 256.
careers, so while Miner did exhibit a passion for education, it is also possible to argue that this passion arose from her having practically no other option.

Overall, the feminist, abolitionist, and educational movements all reaching picking up speed during Miner’s adult years had a profound impact on her focus of accessibility of education. In an 1851 letter to a friend, Miner stated: “no race or people can ever enjoy their rights without cultivation and one of the best methods of securing to any oppressed people their God-given, but man-perverted rights, is to elevate them…and what better can I do that to faithfully instruct them.”\(^53\) From this quote, one gains insight into Miner’s rationale for the necessity for her school: regardless of what type of minority or oppressed group one belongs to, education is the one thing that can lift that group out of despair.

III.

From being raised in a family with deep Christian convictions, Myrtilla Miner internalized the belief that her life mission was to pursue God’s work. In addition to both of her parents belonging to the Calvinist denomination, the county she lived in was often referred to as the “burned over” district because of the frequency in which religious revivals took place. Although she never identified with any denomination, this upbringing left her with strong religious convictions that shaped her moral beliefs.\(^54\)

If one goes through the many letters of correspondence between Miner and her friends, family, donors, and government members, one important theme emerges: Miner’s everyday language is infused with religious undertones. For example, in an Address of an 1854 pamphlet updating donors about the status of the school, Miner asks: “…God having so constituted us that

\(^{53}\) Daniel, 259.

\(^{54}\) Anglim, 1.
it becomes a duty to seek the highest good of our better nature—we may most emphatically ask why the colored people of America, and particularly those of Washington, DC…may not have free schools, the same as any other class of citizens?”55 Simply put, Miner sees her efforts as just fulfilling God’s mission, and creating a school for colored girls is just the way in which God called her to fulfill her purpose. Similarly, in an 1853 letter to a friend, Miner states that she thinks “God designs to employ the feminine principle more in this age for the redemption of the world,” this revealing her reason for creating a school for women as two-fold: because it was God’s plan for her life, and also because it was the role of women to ameliorate social ills.56

Myrtilla Miner’s family also shared this same deep religious conviction. In the margins of an archived Miner Family Bible, Miner’s uncle James H. Miner wrote the following note:

My niece, Myrtilla Miner with faith and power from her Creator and much earthly opposition but with deep love and sympathy for the Negro Slave’s children, undertook to provide a school to educate them. Myrtilla sees great talents in these depressed children…Sometimes we fear for Myrtilla’s safety—though brave she is. She has no fear. Time alone can only tell the outcome of her faith and venture for good. God’s grace and protection will see her through with what we can help in funds.57

In this note, Miner’s uncle credits her faith and power from God, and also notes that God will give her protection from harm. He writes of the “earthly opposition” to her mission which he most likely credits as the source of the family’s fear. By mentioning that she has “deep love and sympathy” for African American children, it further confirms Miner’s true dedication towards her cause.


56 O’Connor, 44.

57 Pages from the Miner Family Bible, 1851, Document, From UDC Archives, MTC-1-1.
Similarly, while in Mississippi, a friend proposed to Miner: “In heavens [sic] name my dear Myrtle do all the good you can—let your light shine, and sweet peace of conscience shall be yours, with your heavenly fathers [sic] blessing. Would that you could teach the black children of our Lord as well as his white ones!” From these correspondences to Miner, one can gain a sense of her undertaking almost being seen as a religious mission. Following this thought, Miner believes that God made educating African Americans her life purpose, and her friends and family reinforced this idea through their support and best wishes. According to this understanding, she will successfully create this school, and no matter what challenges she may face, she should accept them with open arms, as God will protect her throughout.

IV.

The final reason Miner dedicated her life to the accessibility of education, particularly for African Americans, is that she truly empathized with the African American situation. In fact, she differed from northern abolitionists in the way that she argued for increased educational opportunities, as opposed to immediate emancipation as her own way to have an impact on segregation.

While attending the Young Ladies Domestic Seminary, Miner had her first experience with African American girls striving to obtain an education when the principal decided to enroll three African American girls. The principal, Reverend H. Kellogg, said of this act: “I chose to regard and treat them as pupils not as colored pupils.” This act most likely had a profound impact on Miner’s view towards African Americans attaining an education, and helped shape her

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58 Foner and Pacheco, 108.
59 Daniel, 32.
60 Wells, 361.
view that just like any other member of society, African Americans deserve education as well.

Three years after leaving the Seminary, while a teacher in the Clover Street Seminary at Rochester, Miner wrote to a friend: “Early in life my attention was called to the subject of American Slavery and feeling no satisfaction in its contemplation I became exceedingly desirous to travel and teach in the South in order that I might see it as it would appear to me.” 61 This desire remained during her time in Rochester, and in 1847 Miner moved to the South to teach in the Newton Female Institute at Whitesville, Mississippi, which was a school for wealthy planters’ daughters. 62

Miner’s teaching position in Mississippi allowed her to witness slavery for the first time. From this experience, she began to feel a moral dilemma: “she rejoiced in the opportunity to indulge in her desire teaching; but she weakened from the physical and emotional strain caused by abhorrence of what she observed.” 63 From this statement, it becomes evident that Miner is in despair, but one cannot tell if it is primarily because of the physical pain she is in, or the emotional pain from witnessing the horrors of slavery. Seeing the condition of the slaves, Miner asks the principal, L. D. Phares, if she could have permission to teach the slaves during her free time, to which he responded it was illegal, and that “Northern philanthropists have a vast work to do at home to elevate their own free colored people.” 64 Miner states: “Wherever I go, horror and despair attend me and I do not wish to become any more acquainted with a people who shock me

61 Wells, 361.
62 Wells, 362.
64 Daniel, 33.
by their injustice and place such sights and sounds of woe before me.”

Not only did Miner feel concern for the slaves who could not attain an education, but she was also deeply concerned about the white children who would get an informal education in the institution of slavery. Writing to her employer, Miner stated: “I cannot stay at home without feeling that your precious children must be contaminated and their sensibilities perverted by such things.”

Evidently, Miner’s strong moral convictions saw fault not just in the institution of slavery as it existed, but also in the rippling effect it would have on white children.

Perhaps one of the best examples of Miner’s devotion towards the amelioration of the issues of slavery is exemplified in yet another letter she sent to Dr. Phares, this one with an overt angry tone. In it, she writes that she acts the way she does towards the slaves “because I want to treat them like humans,” and that “I wish to fly, & as I have often told you, I would willingly break my own neck, if by it I could do any possible good.”

This is just one of many examples where Miner openly stated that she would sacrifice her life for the sake of creating educational opportunities for African Americans. In 1858, while still searching for the funds to secure her school the Christian Inquirer took out an add to help support her, mentioning the hard work “this devoted lady has labored, and sacrificed ease and health, and almost life itself, as the martyrs do.”

Additionally, Daniel suggests that, although it might not be definite, “it may be understandable that Myrtilla Miner who was frail of physique and deprived of opportunity

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66 Null, 257.

67 Foner and Pacheco, 108.

should have sympathy for the weak, appreciation for the struggling, and respect for the ambitious.” She thoroughly believed that every human being had “both a natural right to knowledge and the potentiality for achieving it,” despite the societal factors that attempted to prevent certain groups from attaining an education.

Furthermore, Wells notes that Miner’s “interest in the education of Negroes was the consequence of her mental and psychological approach to the whole broad subject of amelioration of the ills suffered by the slaves and free colored folk.” Thus, this further explains the rationale that Miner’s own oppressive characteristics (her gender, her socio-economic status, and her illness) allowed her to empathize with slaves and make it her life’s mission to uplift the black race. Miner’s influence can be seen through the following quote from one of her former students:

Her whole living was intense, and there was but little repose about her. I have a distinct recollection that whenever she was with me she kept me alive all over. But whatever else she was, she was unquestionably the true friend of the then despised colored race; and whatever else she did or did not do, she labored for that race, and groaned in spirit for them.

While a study of history presents us with various testimonials of white northerners and members of the DC government praising the school, a testimonial such as this one does a lot more for Miner’s legacy. While petitioning for the start of a school, Miner boldly wrote that she “transcribe(s) the offering I make of myself upon the Anti-Slavery Altar of my country . . . my

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69 Daniel, 34.
70 Daniel, 35.
71 Wells, 367.
72 O’Connor, 112.
spirit is strong and I sincerely hope it may be accepted."\textsuperscript{73} A true warrior for the cause of educating to overcome oppression, Miner was an overall empathetic person who could effectively communicate her mission to donors and stakeholders, while still remaining deeply connected to and invested in her students.

Born into a Northern family with strong religious principles, Miner upheld strong moral and ethical philosophies, and was not afraid to speak out when confronted with a social ill. Consistently ill and weak, yet strong-willed, Miner was essentially a martyr for her cause: ensuring that everyone who wanted an education could achieve one, regardless of race, even if it brought her to her death. As Null writes: "Armed with strong moral and intellectual convictions, Miner arrived in Washington in 1851."\textsuperscript{74} From this point forward, Miner would endure various challenges, including but not limited to discouragement from Frederick Douglass, knowledge of other schools similar to hers that failed, difficulty securing money for her school, and threats on her school building, as well as illness which eventually took her life in 1864. Despite the obstacles in her way, Miner never stopped fighting for this greater cause, and as a result of her hard work, she provided generations of African American women with the opportunity to access a higher education. Because of this, "her memory is certainly held precious in the throngs of her pupils, in the hearts of the colored people of the District, and of all who took knowledge of her life and who reverence the cause in which she offered herself a willing sacrifice."\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{74} Null, 254.

\textsuperscript{75} Special Report to the Commissioner of Education, 210.
Chapter 3: Memory of Myrtilla Miner at 100 Years

“I love this school of mine profoundly, and have really no idea, when I am with them, that they are not white, recognizing their ‘spiritual’ more than their ‘physical.’”—Myrtilla Miner

During her lifetime, Myrtilla Miner was often described as a martyr. For example, in 1858, while still searching for the funds to secure her school the Christian Inquirer took out an advertisement to help support her, mentioning the hard work “this devoted lady has labored, and sacrificed ease and health, and almost life itself, as the martyrs do.”76 Similarly, in 1883, when recalling what he knew about Myrtilla Miner, Frederick Douglass described her as this “brave little woman who first invaded the city of Washington.”77 Despite her “slender, wiry, pale” physical appearance, Douglass found her as a “presence that demanded my whole attention.”78 When first encountered with her, Douglass comments that he “saw at a glance that the fire of a real enthusiasm lighted my eyes, and the true martyr spirit flamed in her soul.”79 While all high praise for a woman simply enacting what she deemed to be God’s plan for her life, this description of Miner gives insight into how history remembers her.

One hundred years after the start of the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls, and eighty-seven years after Myrtilla Miner’s death, the Washington, DC community gathered to celebrate the Miner Centennial during the week of March fourth, 1951. An essay by Charles Walker Thomas, a professor of English at Miner Teachers College, best documents the essence

76 “Normal School for Colored Girls in Washington, DC.”
78 Velez, “Myrtilla Miner: Teaching ‘Colored Girls to Teach.’”
79 Velez, “Myrtilla Miner: Teaching ‘Colored Girls to Teach.’”
of the celebratory spirit. The essay, entitled “Miner Teachers College Centennial: A Glance at the Past Becomes a Forward Gaze” opens with the following quote from college president Eugene A. Clark:

This week we celebrate a hundred years of educational effort by recapitulating the story of significant characters, events, and ideas associated with this institution. This story has resolved itself into the present College, and like a parable, should help us to determine, to chart, and to pursue our course in the future...Time, the artist, has been delineating the perspectives of our history for a hundred years on the canvas which we now welcome you to examine.80

This introductory statement introduces the idea of a mission or an ideology as evolving through time, and also opens up the possibility that an observer at any time will examine and come to their own conclusions based on current society. Throughout the essay, Thomas references and quotes some of the important takeaways from the various centennial events throughout the week. Particularly, through Thomas’s description of the week’s events celebrating Miner, the reader gains an understanding of how faculty and students of the mid-twentieth century adopted Miner and her ideology to fit their current societal needs.

This chapter will go as follows: I will begin with an overview of education and race relations in DC during this time period as a way to contextualize why this centennial celebration was so important for this community, and then do a close reading of Charles Walker Thomas’ address. I would also like to acknowledge that my overview of education and race relations in DC cannot fully encapsulate the entire range of issues due to page limits, and thus should not be taken as a complete guide to education and race in the District in the 1950’s.

I.

80 Charles Walker Thomas, Charles Walker Thomas Address, 1951, Document, From UDC Archives, University Activities, 1.
Before I begin, I would like to outline the different phases Miner’s schools underwent up until its centennial. After founding the school in 1851, Myrtilla Miner continued to run and teach at the school until her health started to fail in 1857. When Miss Miner took some time off to heal, her friend Emily Howland offered to teach, and was eventually placed in charge of the school in 1857. In 1860 as the Civil War began to approach, Miss Miner decided to close her school, and moved to California to attempt to recover from her illness. While in California, Miss Miner’s friends were back in Washington, DC working diligently to ensure that her school could reopen after the war. Under the initiative of Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, Congress passed an act for the incorporation of the Institute for the Education of Colored Youth, “thus putting, at last, the national seal and sanction on the labors of so many years of prayer and struggle.” The act declared “the objects of which institution are to educate and improve the moral and intellectual condition of such of the colored youth of the nation,” and listed Myrtilla Miner, Henry Addison, John C. Underwood, George J. Abbott, William H. Channing, and Nancy M. Johnson as the corporators of this institute. Although this act was incorporated in 1863, it was not until 1871 that the school opened again, this time in connection with Howard University, an arrangement that lasted until 1876. After the corporators decided the school would operate best independently and the Howard partnership was terminated, the Miner Normal School reopened on P St, NW on September 13, 1876. In 1879, the Trustees of the Public Schools of the District

81 Chronology of the University of the District of Columbia, Document, From UDC Archives, Box 1, UDC 1-4.
82 O’Connor, 100.
83 O’Connor, 100.
84 O’Connor, 103.
85 O’Connor, 104.
of Columbia come to an agreement with the Institute that “establishes a normal school for colored children of the public schools of the District of Columbia at the Miner School Building.” Thus, the school becomes part of the District of Columbia Public Schools, and was renamed Miner Normal School, a name that the school kept until adopting the title Miner Teachers College in 1929. This then leads us to 1951, the centennial celebration of Miner Teachers College.

In the years leading up to this centennial celebration, the nation saw an increase in lawsuits that sought to prove the unconstitutionality of segregation in higher education. *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938) represented the first higher education lawsuit that reached the United States Supreme Court. In this case, Lloyd Gaines, a black applicant to the University of Missouri Law School, received a rejection letter from the school. After filing a civil suit against Missouri, the state admitted that he was rejected because of his race, but the state still sided with the University. When Gaines brought the case to the Supreme Court, it ruled that because Missouri did not have a separate law school for black students, the school was required to admit him. However, instead of doing so, Missouri hastily built a new all-black law school that was significantly unequal to the University of Missouri Law School. Additionally, just one year before the centennial celebration, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund argued the *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) case. In this case, the segregated University of Texas Law School denied admission to a black applicant, Heman Sweatt. After suing the school at the state level with the help of the

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86 Chronology of the District of Columbia.


NAACP and losing, Sweatt brought the case to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that under the Equal Protection Clause, Sweatt would be required admission to the law school. This was decided when it was presented that the “law school for Negroes” that was set to open in 1947 would be unequal to the University of Texas Law School, and thus would be unconstitutional. Cases such as these began the desegregation process of southern universities, while northern universities that already accepted black students began the process of equal treatment, such as the University of Nebraska’s adoption of a nondiscrimination policy in 1949. Efforts to increase black enrollment in white institutions also took place through The National Scholarship and Service Fund for Negro Students, which is credited as the first black talent identification program. This program identified talented black students for colleges and universities, and in 1950 it successfully placed almost 200 black students in northern private colleges. This shows the landscape of higher education as the Miner Normal School, still an all-black institution, entered its centennial year. While since its inception the school remained all-black to provide a higher education specifically for African Americans since they were systematically left out of universities, in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Movement this “separate but equal” system began to be challenged in the legal sphere. Miner Normal School had a challenge of its own, as there still existed two normal schools in the District of Columbia: Wilson Normal School for whites and Miner Normal School for blacks. Sensing the impending movement towards integration, Miner Normal School used its centennial celebration to capitalize on the values Myrtilla Miner fought for as a pioneer of equitable education for all who sought it.

89 Gasman and Geiger, 13.


91 Gasman and Geiger, 13.
II.

Now, to put this even further into context, just four years after the centennial, after the passing of the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* decision, Miner Teachers College would merge with the all-white Wilson Teachers College to become the District of Columbia Teachers College.\(^92\) Surprisingly enough, while the 1954 integration mandate left Miner Teachers College and Wilson Teachers College with no choice but to merge, the schools had been in conversation about integration years prior. In a September 1950 Sunday Star article entitled *Teacher College Segregation Hit by Wilson Head: Merger with Miner Proposed as ‘Logical and Desirable’ Step,* the author reveals that Dr. Walter E. Hager, president of Wilson, submitted a proposal to the Department of Education for a merger between the two institutions, which was most likely influenced by the movement towards integration as previously outlined.\(^93\)

There are several key aspects to this proposal: first and foremost, that it was the president of Wilson who initiated this proposal. While the previous section noted the movement on a national scale towards the end of segregation, a movement to end segregation in DC began to take place as well, starting as early as 1930. However, the first legal case challenging segregation did not occur until the *Carr v. Corning* case, in which the parents of Marguerite Carr attempted to transfer their daughter from the overcrowded all-black Browne Junior High School to the all-white Eliot Junior High School. While the decision upheld segregation, it was seen as a stepping stone for the *Bolling v. Sharpe* (1954) case, which was included as part of *Brown v. Board of Ed.*

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\(^93\) Jeanne Rogers, “Teacher College Segregation Hit by Wilson Head,” in *America’s Historical Newspapers*, September 3, 1950, *The Sunday Star*, accessed April 25, 2017, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbhid=C53J45QBMTQ4OTc4MTU1My40OTg3NDY6MToxMzoxNDEuMTYxLjoxE0&c_action=doc&d_viewref=search&s_lastnonissuename=12&p_queryname=12&p_docnum=30&p_docref=v2:13D5DA85AE05A305@EANX-1484F8531F11BFA9@2433528-1484E4F49571AF42@0-148575B0B42916A0@.
Education. These specific cases demonstrate the movement towards education on the K-12 level, but still show the general move towards ending the dual, race-based educational system in the District for moral, legal, and financial reasons. In the case for the merger between Wilson and Miner, Dr. Hager cited cost as one of the main reasons why a merger was “logical and eminently desirable.” Stating that a merger would be cheaper and more effective for both schools, Dr. Hager included a list of requests for additional faculty members, clerks, equipment, supplies, and other facilities that were rejected due to lack of funds. By merging the two schools, resources could be combined, thus saving the District a considerable amount of funds.

Additionally, it is also important to note that the students of both schools were on board and eager for the merge. The report by Dr. Hager suggested that over the years he has observed that the students of both institutions were ready for the merger, while also stating that: “most important, it should be easier in a non-segregated teachers’ college to educate teachers who can most effectively prepare the children of the community for the merging of the other schools when the time seems appropriate.” This statement is important because it suggests that integration is imminent. In fact, in the report Dr. Hager even states that “it is not clear how long the public schools of Washington can continue to operate a dual system.” Dr. Hager’s statement seems to echo a similar sentiment in the district during the mid-twentieth century. For example, the 1950 Bolling v. Sharpe case, which would eventually become one of the

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95 Rogers, “Teacher College Segregation Hit by Wilson Head.”

96 Rogers, “Teacher College Segregation Hit by Wilson Head.”

97 Rogers, “Teacher College Segregation Hit by Wilson Head.”
consolidated Brown v. Board of Ed cases, began the fight to end segregated school in Washington, DC. The importance of this case was that James Nabrit, Jr., who later provided legal representation for the case, did not attempt to prove that the schools the plaintiffs attended were inferior to the all-white option, but instead that the issue solely was the constitutionality of segregation. Evidently, discussion around eradicating segregation was a relevant issue as the Miner Teachers College Centennial approached, and had an influence on the way the school celebrated this anniversary.

Thus, this is the climate of the District around the time of the Miner Teachers College Centennial. As described further in the next section, the Miner Teachers College Centennial Celebration, with a particular emphasis on the Charles Walker Thomas Address, addresses the racial concerns at the time and adopts Myrtilla Miner as symbol of racial progress.

II.

Miner Teachers College made a grand celebration of their centennial. The program spanned several days--from March fourth to March tenth--and included events such as the annual pilgrimage to Myrtilla Miner’s gravesite, an Alumni Night, and a play honoring Miner’s life. In the second part of this paper, I will do an analysis of an essay entitled “Miner Teachers College Centennial: A Glance at the Past Becomes a Forward Gaze,” delivered by Charles Walker Thomas, Professor of English at Miner Teachers College. This seven-page essay gives an insight into the seven-day celebration by summarizing the events and speakers of the week, and

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inserting his own opinion of the celebration into the essay. While this essay does a great job giving the reader insight into the week, by analyzing the essay’s rhetoric one can also gain an understanding of the way faculty and students adopted Miner’s life and legacy to fit into the issue facing mid-twentieth century society. Considering the societal climate outlined in the previous section, the reader already has an understanding that stakeholders involved with Miner Teachers College already see integration as a necessary next step for the institution.

Early in the essay, Thomas states: “History at its best recounts and interprets the past in a way that will make the present more comprehensible and the future perhaps more predictable.”\textsuperscript{101} From this statement, the reader understands that just as one analyzes historical texts, Thomas and the speakers at the centennial celebration are doing the same. This statement is an acknowledgement that the events at the celebration look to the history of Miner Teachers College as a way to understand and respond to current issues, as well as understand what the future holds. Throughout the essay, Thomas highlights certain events that took place over the celebration week and summarizes them.

Thomas recounts an address given by Dr. John Hope Franklin, a history professor at Howard University. In this address, Franklin states: “It is a curious and ironical twist of fate that the institution that was conceived with blood and sweat of a woman who believed so passionately in human rights has become part of a system of education that denies fundamental principles in human relations to which she gave her very life.”\textsuperscript{102} This statement is extremely powerful rhetoric in that he connects Miner to a system that denied fundamental rights to a particular group of people. What he is acknowledging is that in her pursuit of her original

\textsuperscript{101} Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.

\textsuperscript{102} Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
school—Miner Normal School for Colored Girls—she succeeded despite opposition because of her “belief in the quality of all men and in their right to a fair chance of personal development.” Thomas acknowledges that only a scholar like Dr. Franklin “could illumine the Myrtilla Miner story so that in mid-twentieth century it would goad us into daring thought and action.” As previously mentioned, part of the agenda for the week-long celebration was to promote integration. Dr. Franklin accomplishes this by making the attendees feel personally connected to Miner’s life mission, and then informing the attendees that it is also their mission to continue this legacy. While giving a synopsis of Franklin’s address, and following the description of Miner’s spirit as “Christian, democratic, and truly American,” Thomas calls the attendees “spiritual descendants of Miss Miner.” And, as the spiritual descendants of Miner, Franklin calls the audience to “radical action.” Clearly, Dr. Franklin is using Miner as a marker for social progress and equality. Thomas observes that Dr. Garnet C. Wilkinson, who gave the eulogy at the pilgrimage to Miner’s gravesite, followed a similar pattern. After reflecting on Miner’s virtues of courage, sacrifice, and devotion, he “pleaded with her professional heirs” (or the spiritual descendants of Miner, or the celebration attendees), to “be touched by her devotion. . .stimulated by her unselfishness. . .motivated by her courage.” Both of these examples rely on touching the empathy of the attendees and making them feel Miner’s

103 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
104 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
105 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
106 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
107 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
ideology. Through their methods, they link the past to the present, reinforcing that Miner’s work is not complete yet, and they have a profound role to play.

Later in the week, students perform a play entitled “A Century and Beyond,” written by Paul Phillips Cooke. Through the play, Cooke relays to the audience that “a hundred years of the progress of Miner is history; beyond that point in conjecture—perhaps prophecy.” The prophecy that Cooke displays in his play is the hope that by 1961, Miner and Wilson “will long since have been integrated into a multiple-purpose municipal institution.” In each of the aforementioned examples, the professors and playwrights use various mediums to push this integration agenda, which directly connects with the moral desire for integration explained in the first section.

While Thomas made many important remarks throughout the essay, perhaps the most pivotal is when he makes the following statement: “Especially now when liberalism is being intimated and persecuted is there a need for Myrtilla Miners who will dare to risk the loss of reputation and personal security in their pursuit of truth and justice.” It is here that we see Miner as much more than simply the founder of this institution. With this very statement, Thomas turns Miner into an ideal that, especially during a time with a lot of debate around segregation, people should strive for. To prove this point even further, consider the following quote: “For now with sharpened vision, depended faith, and whetted determination the community looks forward to an expanded Miner, which will more completely fulfill the

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108 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 3.
109 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 3.
110 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 2.
founder’s dream and answer the needs of current needs.”111 There is no question that the speakers throughout the week used their platform—and the attendees evident appreciation for Miner—to evoke an emotional response in the audience that would hopefully lead them to fight for integration, which would eventually take place in 1954.

Even President Harry S. Truman felt the need to acknowledge this anniversary. In a letter directed to Miner Teachers College President Eugene A. Clark, Truman extends “sincere congratulations” to Miner Teachers College, stating it should “be a source of justifiable pride” when thinking of the history of the institution and the service it has provided for the District.112 Truman also acknowledged the importance of “qualified and consecrated teachers,” who “provide our people with the knowledge, skill, and culture that are essential to success in the present emergency, and constitute our first line of defense against false propaganda and many other evil forces.”113 Thomas notes that Truman wrote this letter with the understanding that the work of education is to prepare students for citizenship in a world community, in order to “fashion the kind of nation and world that should promote international understanding.” 114

While it is not just during this particularly contentious year that Miner Teachers College chose to honor their founder in this particular way, as annual Founders Day Celebrations began as early as 1933, the racial climate of DC combined with the school’s important milestone provided the perfect opportunity for the school to push a pro-integration agenda. From this essay,

111 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 6.


113 Miner Teachers College—President Harry S. Truman’s Letter of Congratulation on the 100th Anniversary of Myrtilla Miner Founding her School in Washington, DC.

114 Charles Walker Thomas Address, 1.
one gains an understanding that part of the mission of the week was to make attendees aware of the virtues the founder possessed, identify themselves as the “spiritual descendants” of Myrtilla Miner, and see their role as advocating for integrated schools. Thus, in this way, Miner is seen as a usable past. Her spirit and her ideologies transcend her mid-nineteenth century struggle, and can be applied to any point in time where the institution can play a role in supporting social progress.
Chapter 4: Myrtilla Miner’s Evolving Legacy at UDC

“...I always count these as ‘way-marks,’ or points for erecting altars, where the heart’s incense may rise, acknowledging all the good of the past, and throwing into the censer the great hopes of the future.” – Myrtilla Miner

On the brisk morning of February 16th, 2017, University of the District of Columbia (UDC) alumni, current students, and community members gathered in the Theater of the Arts Auditorium to attend the 41st Annual Founder’s Day Celebration. As the rows began to fill, elderly auditorium members began to greet each other with warm hugs and handshakes, evoking the nostalgia of the school they once attended. Shortly after the auditorium lights began to dim, attendees took their seats and the ceremony commenced. The ceremony opened with an introductory video to the University, where the Associate Director of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Michelle Chatman, proudly declared that it is “important to acknowledge the foundation upon which any institution. . . rests.”115 For UDC, that foundation is the Myrtilla Miner Normal School for Girls, the first higher education institution for African American women in the country.116 While UDC no longer serves that role specifically, it has adopted a new focus, as an institution that serves all: both DC residents and beyond. All the while, the university still recognizes its roots as Miner Normal School for Girls, which has undergone many names in its lifetime.117


116 Null, 260.

Throughout the Founders Day video, some students and faculty reflected that in UDC, one can find students that come from “around the city, around the nation, and around the world,”\textsuperscript{118} while others admitted that many Washingtonians do not realize just how diverse the institution is.\textsuperscript{119} Reminiscent of a Sunday morning spent in a Baptist church, the air was filled with feelings of nostalgia, inspiration, pride, and hope. Audience members held hands during the Invocation prayer, bringing about a sense of togetherness in this annual tradition. Speakers at the celebration each reflected on the rich history that, over time, shaped the University into the institution it is today. Speakers praised the University’s accessibility to all students looking to attain higher education, and acknowledged that it still serves a population of students that would otherwise not have access to higher education.

The Founder’s Day celebration concluded with the singing of the university’s Alma Mater, “Our Glorious UDC.”\textsuperscript{120} After the ceremony, attendees gathered in the main hall for food and fellowship, and then dispersed to go about their daily business, concluding yet another successful Founders Day celebration. Throughout the ceremony, only vague mentions were made of the University’s founder. In fact, on more than one occasion, speakers actually mispronounced the name of the founder, calling her “Myrtilda” Miner. While the ceremony was evidently much less Miner-focused than the previous Founders Day celebration of Miner Teachers College—which included plays and speeches dedicated to Miner, as well as a pilgrimage to her gravesite—one message was made clear: because of selfless and tireless work of Myrtilla Miner in the face of opposition, the university of the District of Columbia is the

\textsuperscript{118} “UDC 2017 Founders Day Celebration.”

\textsuperscript{119} “UDC 2017 Founders Day Celebration”

\textsuperscript{120} “Founders’ Day Celebration 2017: Soaring to New Heights.”
institution it is today. And, throughout its forty years in existence, UDC has experienced a reemergence of the celebration of Myrtilla Miner. Through the University of the District of Columbia’s forty years, the institution has seen a return to its origins through increasing recognition and celebration of Myrtilla Miner as its founder. While the creation of the institution from the consolidation of the District of Columbia Teachers College, Federal City College, and Washington Technical Institute in 1977 paved the way to shape a new identity as the only public university in the District, years of conflict and decline paved the way to rebrand the university as one with a rich, longstanding legacy.

I. In 1955, because of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the all-black Miner Teachers College and all-white Wilson Teachers College were consolidated to become the District of Columbia Teachers College (DCTC). However, many DC residents were not satisfied with DCTC and began to lobby for even more higher education options for those who could not benefit from the institution: those who did not want to go into teaching, and those who were African American and poor. Thus, after a 1963 John F. Kennedy-appointed Commission determined that there was a need for more public higher education in the District, Congress enacted the District of Columbia Public Education Act in 1966, which created Federal City College, a liberal arts school, and Washington Technical Institute, a vocational school. The Federal City College, “considered to be a college established for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts,” was created with an “open door” policy in order to reach young men and women of a lower socioeconomic background in the District—a necessity that was seen as long overdue.\textsuperscript{121} Washington Technical Institute (WTI), on the other hand, was created to improve the

skills and employability of DC’s adult workers, especially considering that at the time of its founding, over 60 percent of adult workers in DC had six or less years of formal education. In addition to providing the skills necessary to obtain adequate employment, WTI also provided technical training for high school graduates. However, despite these advances in public education, in 1974, the DC government began to talk of consolidating the District of Columbia Teachers College (DCTC), Federal City College (FCC), and Washington Technical Institute (WTI) into one university into one comprehensive university. The consolidation, which was backed by both the city government and by school officials, would make the public higher education system more effective by eliminating curriculum duplication, funding competition, and also allowing for more central planning.

In 1974, PL 93-198 granted Home Rule for the District of Columbia, while PL 93-471 reorganized public postsecondary education in the District of Columbia. On October 26th of the same year, Congress enacted a statute to create the University of the District of Columbia. By 1975, the DC Council voted to consolidate all three institutions, and a Board of Trustees was established. The Board of Trustees, consisting of eleven members appointed by the DC Mayor, assigned Wendell Russell and Cleveland Dennard, presidents of FCC and WTI, collectively, to

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123 “UCD’s History.”

work together to figure out the tasks necessary to consolidate the three institutions. By August 1, 1977, the consolidation is complete.\textsuperscript{125} It is important to understand this foundation because the process of merging these institutions included the consolidation of vastly different missions, academic programs, facilities, and student bodies.\textsuperscript{126} This is especially important when considering how Miner’s image came to be used over time, especially when given the knowledge that neither of the three merged institutions were direct descendants of the Miner Normal School, since DCTC had been formed from a previous merger.\textsuperscript{127} To understand this further, one must consider the two eldest predecessor institutions that eventually formed the University of the District of Columbia: Miner Normal School in 1851 and Wilson Teachers College in 1873. As detailed earlier, Miner Normal School was founded in 1851 prior to Emancipation to provide an opportunity for free African American women to obtain an education, with the end goal of being teachers of their own race. Wilson Teachers College, on the other hand, was established originally as Washington Normal School in an 1873 Act by the Legislative Assembly of the District of Columbia, “for the special education of advanced pupils, who are to become teachers in the public schools of [DC].”\textsuperscript{128} Unlike Miner Normal School, the institution was founded solely by an act of Congress to train young white high school graduates to become teachers. Normal schools provided an avenue for educating primarily white women in the United States to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[125] Chronology of the University of the District of Columbia.
\item[126] “UDC Finding Aid,” UDC Archives, Box 1.
\end{footnotes}
become teachers—the only profession available to women in the late 1800s and early 1900s.\textsuperscript{129} Thus, there is no one founder of Wilson Teachers College, it simply arose as one of the hundred of normal schools created around the nation. Thus, Myrtilla Miner is the sole person in the lineage of UDC’s history that can be credited for founding a school, which is a key reason why UDC chose to adopt Miner as their founder; simply because there is no one else to credit this accomplishment to.

II.

During the 2017 Founders Day Celebration, Dr. Shiela Harmon of UDC declared that especially during the month of Black history, it is important to “reflect on the heroes whose shoulders we stand on.”\textsuperscript{130} In this case, the shoulders are Myrtilla Miner, as well as the majority white trustee board designated to carry out Miner Teachers College’s Mission post-Civil War. While subsequent Founders Day celebrations and UDC materials have acknowledged the university’s non-linear past, Myrtilla Miner’s mission is always the strain that has remained the most prominent. In an essay looking back on the first hundred years of the institution, the author notes:

These matters of change of location, name, and control and two periods of inactivity might well give rise to the question: ‘Is Miner Teachers College the direct descendant of the school founded by Myrtilla Miner more than one hundred years ago? Despite obvious breaks and sometimes faltering progress in the years prior to 1879, a study of the record reveals such continuity of aim, policy, and support that lineal, if not direct, descent is more than apparent.”\textsuperscript{131}


\textsuperscript{131} William Nelson, “Miner Teachers College: The First Century,” UDC Archives, MTC-1, 3.
Similarly, many may ask the same question today, as the institution has undergone various other location, leadership, and name changes. Through an analysis of the Founder’s Day Convocations, one can begin to see how even in 2017, UDC still holds a lineal, and not direct, descent from Miner’s original 1851 school.

Early in the institution’s founding, UDC did not latch so closely to Myrtilla Miner. In fact, the University of the District of Columbia did not begin celebrating Founder’s Day until 2004, and did not publicly record and advertise the celebration until 2005. 132 While the merge of the three institutions in 1977 naturally created the opportunity to create a brand new identity and focus, this identity did not include Myrtilla Miner. This, however, is not to imply that UDC necessarily had to claim Myrtilla Miner as their founder. As evident in the UDC’s history, the university is barely a direct descendant of Miner Normal School for Colored Girls, and more of an ideological descendant if anything. Of the three institutions that merged to become UDC, only District of Columbia Teachers College could trace its lineage to Miner Normal School, and even that must take into account that DCTC was still formed through a merger with Wilson Teachers College. Thus, it is not obvious that, upon its founding, UDC should immediately begin to claim

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this woman whose school is only faintly connected to this new university. Yet, in a very calculated way, at the turn of the 21st century, UDC resurrected Miner’s image from near-extinction, and now very publicly and proudly hails her as their founder. This may cause one to question: why did it take so long for UDC to recognize Miner as their founder, and why the sudden inspiration in 2004?

In order to begin to understand this, first one must understand that UDC’s early days were marred with conflict, particularly around choosing the institution’s first president. For example, in the months leading up to the proposed opening date of August 1st, 1977, *The Washington Post* published an article entitled “UDC: An ‘Elitist’ Turn?” The article argued that Cleveland Dennard, president of the Washington Technical Institute and one of the prospectives for the university president position, was denied the position because of the fear that he would turn the institution into a vocational direction. As the article implies, the issue resided in a debate reminiscent of the Booker T. Washington-W.E.B. DuBois argument: “whether to educate hands or heads.” Essentially, as previously mentioned, along with the founding of a new university came the opportunity to shape its identity. This debate goes back to the DuBois-ian ideology of education as a way to educate the “Talented Tenth”—or a select group of African American men designated to receive and education and then uplift the entire race—versus emphasizing vocational training as a way to better the condition of African American men.

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134 Raspberry, William. "UDC: An 'Elitist' Turn?"

If UDC was truly committed to retaining Miner’s educational theory, it would have to provide education for all. Thus, whoever UDC chose as their first president would set the foundation of this new university, and this reality caused controversy before the school even opened its doors.

Because of this early struggle, many critics did not believe that the institution would meet the August first deadline, but once it did, there was still much more debate about what direction the university should take.\footnote{“New University, New President.” America’s Historical Newspapers, August 4, 1977, The Washington Star, accessed April 25, 2017, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=A69X56YSMTQ5MDE4NzE1My42NTY0NDF6MToxMzoxNDEuMTYxLjIxLjE0&p_action=doc&d_viewref=search&s_lastnonissuequeryname=4&p_queryname=4&p_docnum=81&p_docref=v2:13D5DA85AE05A305@EANX-14E5C9BF2FFBC4D6@2443360-14E3CA14512B406D@11-14E5D3D7FA749980@.} Perhaps because of the merger itself and influence of various other educational institutions, the original mission of UDC did not claim to closely align with Myrtilla Miner, and no recognition was made of Miner as their founder. Instead, it was simply seen as a brand new institution, and “a new institution must go through the same process of attaining an identity as an individual, and nowhere is it written that it’s easy.”\footnote{“New University, New President.”} Lisle C. Carter, the first president of UDC, was tasked with consolidating the curriculums of a technical institute and two liberal arts institutions, of which he stated: “I think the distinctions can be overstressed.”\footnote{“New University, New President.”} Between 1977 and 2004, UDC did not hold a single Founder’s Day Convocation. The university did implement other programs to support the new union, such as a Multicultural Day which was held “to recognize and celebrate the rich diversity of culture at the university, represented by a multicultural and international faculty, student body and staff from
more than 66 countries and six continents around the world.”  

However, no public celebrations recognizing Myrtilla Miner as the university founder were held.

Not much is documented on the first Founders Day celebration, which took place in 2004 and did not confer as many awards as current Founder’s Day celebrations do. The only indication that a 2004 Founders Day celebration took place is from February 2005 Washington Informer article entitled “UDC’s Struggle—Another Case of Black on Black Crime” that mentions that the “University of the District of Columbia’s Second Annual Founder’s Day Convocation held last week can best be described as bittersweet.”  

While the article mentions that the event was “filled with pride duly based upon the unique legacy and distinguished past that sets UDC apart from any other university in the nation,” it is still “heartbreaking to see the impact of the neglect by Congress and D.C. leaders, coupled with the crippled leadership of past UDC administrators, that has brought the current administration, faculty, alumni and staff to its knees.”  

Evidently, this is not much of a grand announcement of the Founder’s Day celebration, and does not give much insight into the reason behind starting the celebrations, or even what took place at that first celebration. The author of the article juxtaposes UDC’s “unique legacy and distinguished past” with its state at that moment: declining enrollment, a high president turnover rate, budget deficits, and many other issues.  

Despite the growth UDC underwent in the years since its founding, including the acquisition of Antioch Law School, the construction of the Van Ness campus, and receiving accreditation, around 1990 the university began to see a decline. By 2002,

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140 Barnes, "UDC’s Struggle - Another Case of Black on Black Crime."

141 Barnes, "UDC’s Struggle - Another Case of Black on Black Crime."

142 Barnes, "UDC’s Struggle - Another Case of Black on Black Crime."
UDC already had six presidents, with some even resigning within the year of being inaugurated. For two months in 1990, UDC students held protests regarding the problems at UDC. Students protested UDC again in 1996, and in the same year the university is forced to close for three months for financial reasons. Later on that year, after reopening, UDC has to close again for six weeks because of a $16 million deficit. In one major blow in 1997, the UDC Board of Trustees terminated 125 faculty members, provided six weeks of severance pay, eliminated 168 university positions, cut the sports program, and faced the resignation of 15 financial aid officers.¹⁴³ In the 2005 article, John B. Childress, president of the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area, is quoted as saying: “Why doesn’t DC care enough about educating its own residents?”¹⁴⁴ However, the article reveals one major tension: the school officials’ admission that they did not expect any change in the near future mirrored the way DC officials responded to increasing black-on-black youth crime. The author suggests that for these desperate youth, an improved UDC has the potential to be the only hope for the future. Perhaps it was this admission, and UDC reaching a near-breaking point that UDC officials needed to come up with a way to unite the UDC community and ensure that it served its purpose: to educate the DC residents who had no other chance at a higher education. And, it is with the recognition that this theme of accessibility of education for African Americans parallels the other two periods in history explored in this thesis. Thus, UDC intentionally resurrected Myrtilla Miner’s legacy in a way that revealed that not only did they have a duty to the residents of the District because of their status as the only public university, but also because of the weight they carried from being a

¹⁴³ Chronology of the University of the District of Columbia.
¹⁴⁴ Barnes, Denise Rolark. "UDC's Struggle - Another Case of Black on Black Crime."
descendant of a mission started by a woman who committed her life to providing education for
this same oppressed population.

The following quote from the June 2007 UDC Spark, the university’s community
newspaper, perfectly sums up one of the reasons UDC decided to begin celebrating Founders
Day:

When the University of the District of Columbia established the tradition of Founder’s
Day, it was with the intent of honoring not only current students, but also alumni of UDC
and all nine predecessor institutions. The University’s Office of Recruitment and
Admissions have now effectively used Founder’s Day to establish a link between the
UDC of today and the students of tomorrow.145

The 2005 Founder’s Day celebration, aimed at honoring excellence in education, began with a
ceremonial parade. Four different awards were conferred: the Ronald H. Brown Distinguished
Leadership Award, the Cleveland L. Dennard Distinguished Service Award. These awards had
not been awarded in the inaugural celebration, and each had their own criteria awardees had to
meet to be eligible for the award.146 The introduction of these prestigious awards marks the
beginning of a shift in the way UDC branded itself and owned its history. While the convocation
took place before the following recognitions, the university was headed towards a path of
positive change in 2005: in March 2005, the university’s department of education received its
first national endorsement from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.147
In the same month, UDC won the Middle State’s Standards of Excellence.148 During August of

145 “John Tyler Elementary Students—Future Firebirds,” The UDC Spark, vol. v no 11, June 1, 2007,

146 Mike Andrews, “University of the District of Columbia Founder’s Day Convocation to Honor


148 Chronology of the University of the District of Columbia.
the same year, UDC’s law school, the David A. Clarke School of Law, received full accreditation from the ABA. This shift began to change the way UDC advertised its history, as the press release announcing the 2005 Founder’s Day celebration explains that the “seeds for higher education that grew into the University of the District of Columbia were first planted in 1851, when Myrtilla Miner founded Miner Normal School, a ‘school for colored girls.’” This paragraph would then be placed on the bottom of each of the Founders Day press releases between 2005-2007, as a proclamation of the university’s unique history that extended beyond the 1977 merger.

The following list below details the names of the Founder’s Day convocations, in chronological order. Note that the names of the 2005, 2006, 2009, and 2016 ceremonies are not publicly archived, and the 2013 Founder’s Day celebration was cancelled.

2007: “Celebrating 30 Years—Reclaiming our Alumni”
2009: “The Pathway to Excellence”
2011: “160 Years of Scholarship and Achievement”
2014: “Honoring Our Legacy, Blazing New Trails”
2015: “Myrtilla Miner: Celebrating a Legacy of Excellence in Education”
2017: “Soaring to New Heights”

149 Chronology of the University of the District of Columbia.

In the press release announcing the 2007 celebration, UDC announced that the Founder’s Day would kick off a “year-long celebration of thirty years of distinctive service to the citizens of the District of Columbia.” By 2008, UDC started a campaign to bring together the alumni from all of the predecessor institutions. According to the press release: “This year’s Founder’s Day, much like last year, continues a campaign to attract University graduates of all her predecessor institutions to return to their alma mater to reacquaint and re-commit themselves to the mission.” The 2013 Founder’s Day was cancelled due to the many transitions taking place in UDC at the time, but the Founder’s Day Planning Committee made sure to release a statement explaining that they understood “the importance of maintaining a strong focus on its history” and that throughout the year they would use several opportunities to celebrate the rich history and legacies of the university. From 2005-2012, the following awards named after either former staff members or graduates of any of the nine predecessor schools were conferred: the Ronald H. Brown Distinguished Leadership Award (named after the Honorable Ronald Brown, former Chairman of the university’s Board of Trustees), the Cleveland L. Dennard Distinguished Service Award (named after the former president of the Washington Technical Institute), the Marjorie Holloman Parker Distinguished Educator’s Award (named after the 1936 graduate of Miner Teachers College and former Chairwoman of the UDC Board of Trustees), and the Paul Phillips Cooke Lifetime Achievement Award (named after the 1937 Miner Teachers College graduate). Additionally, the convocations also conferred a President’s Award. Evidently, while


UDC used Founder’s Day as a way to honor all of their predecessors and founders, as the years have progressed, the ceremonies have seen a resurgence in the celebration of Myrtilla Miner, the most evident of that being the introduction of the Myrtilla Miner Award for Exceptional Service. Since 2014, the Founders Day Convocations have done more to recognize Myrtilla Miner, especially through the Myrtilla Miner Award, whose description states:

The Myrtilla Miner Award for Exceptional Service to Society is bestowed on a person/s the President of the University determines has demonstrated exceptional lifetime services to the residents of the District of Columbia and the nation. This year’s award is presented posthumously to Myrtilla Miner, an abolitionist who founded Normal School for Colored Girls (aka Normal Miner School, Normal Teachers College in Washington, D.C.). The school was eventually merged with other educational institutions to form the University of the District of Columbia. Ms. Charlotte Payne Wright, Treasurer of the Thomas Minor Society, will accept the award.154

The importance of this award lies not only in the fact that it was created for the first time, but also that it was given posthumously to Miner. This is one of the greatest acts of honor and recognition an institution can present, and since then only those who have demonstrated a Miner-like spirit have been bestowed with this highest award.

The 2017 Founder’s Day Program announced the following statement: “For more than eight generations, the University of the District of Columbia and its predecessor institutions have quite literally changed the lives of thousands of students for whom a quality education seemed out of reach.”155 While the formal founding of the university was 1977, this is evidence of the lineal, not direct, descent connecting the University of the District of Columbia to the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls. Through even its brief history as UDC, the institution has undergone various changes, yet there has always been one common thread that runs through each


155 2017 Founders Day Program, 5.
of the different phases of UDC’s life: “[UDC has] envisioned a more equitable society and believed that education and learning opportunities should be available to everyone.”\textsuperscript{156} At its core, this is what Myrtilla Miner fought for some 166 years ago, and UDC has come to increasingly recognize that and own it as their own.

\textsuperscript{156} 2017 Founders Day Program, 5.
Chapter 5: The Importance of Institutional Memory

“Character is what the age calls for; character that dare do a noble deed; that can outlive the ebb tide of a false world’s judgment; that can be true to God and man and leave the result.” — Myrtilla Miner

In a threat to the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls in March 1852—just a few months after the opening of the school—a Washington, DC citizen told Miss Miner: “colored people will never thank you; they are a most ungrateful lot. Paying all deference to your judgment, Madam, which I hold in the highest respect. . .I assure you that you will be disappointed in your expectations.” Yet, just one month shy of exactly 165 years from the date of that threat, hundreds of alumni—mostly African American—gathered in an auditorium for an annual celebration of Myrtilla Miner and her school. How is it that this strong-willed little white woman from the north came to be seen as one of the most important figures in educating the African American population in DC?

Essentially, this thesis is an analysis of how an individual builds an institution, and how an institution builds up an individual. Specifically, how Myrtilla Miner, a “brave little woman,” ended up building a small schoolhouse, which extended further than her original purpose into a 21st-century university, and in turn how the institution came cement her legacy in their own history. While the mergers of the various different predecessor institutions threatened to send Miner’s memory onto the verge of extinction—other than the written documents about her and buildings with her name still displayed on them—UDC resurrected her image and really adopted it as their own. The previous three chapters really dissect how this process of memory takes shape, specifically how at different phases of the institution’s existence, the administrators really took Miner’s mission and molded it to fit the agenda they were trying to push—whether that be fighting for integration, or celebrating its status as the only university in the District committed
to educating its citizens. This section, however, seeks to delve a little deeper into race and gender. While the study of memory is important, it is also extremely important to acknowledge that, due to certain privileges possessed by Miss Miner, she was able to do any of this work at all.

First and foremost, Miner felt that her “mission on earth had somewhat to do with the oppressed & the afflicted—the cast out & down-trodden colored race.” Miner is able to come to this conclusion from a position of privilege. While she acknowledged that she felt a deep passion to educate black children, she also came to the conclusion that “if not, white citizens.” In other words, whereas black teachers only had the option to educate black children, Miner could choose which race of children to teach, and could have easily avoided any trouble by just teaching white children. Perhaps one specific correspondence with John F. Cook, a black clergyman who ran the most successful school for African Americans in the District at the time emphasized Miner’s racial privilege. While still in the early stages of planning her school, Miner wrote a letter to Cook, to which he responded he was pleased “that there are those who are willing to make sacrifices, with reference to the advancement of our race in mental moral and religious improvement, and who are willing to contribute to their qualification for usefulness in this their native country.” However, he stated that he could not assist her because he had to try his best to avoid situations that would stir up racial tension in the city. In fact, he even said directly to her: “I think the less people of color…have to do with its establishment the better for

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157 Foner, & Pacheco, 113.
158 Foner & Pacheco, 113.
159 Foner & Pacheco, 116.
the object itself, and for you personally.” In fact, Cook suggested that the only way that her mission could be achieved was through her white friends, as he believed African Americans did not have “neither voice nor vote” in DC.

Additionally, Miner’s privilege also came from her social capital. This thesis cites comments Frederick Douglass made of Miner, a friendship that initiated because of Miner’s bold nature, as one day she simply walked into his office and told him her plan to open a school for African American girls. In a letter to a trustee of the Miner School, Douglass recalls his initial discouragement to Miner, but eventual approval of the success of her school. In a letter later made available to the general American public, Douglass states:

If we owe it to the generations that go before us, and to those which come after us, to make some record of the good deeds we have met with in our journey through life, and to perpetuate the memory and example of those who have in a signal manner made themselves serviceable to suffering humanity, we certainly should not forget the brave little woman who first invaded the city of Washington, to establish here a school for the education of a class Long despised and neglected.

Considering the influential position Douglass held in American society, this statement about Miner essentially wrote her into history. While many Americans may not have heard about this little lady who started a small school in Washington, DC, approval of one of the nation’s more prominent abolitionists influenced the way in which she would be remembered as an integral part of African American history.

Frederick Douglass was not the only acquaintance Miner who was a prominent member of society. In fact, Miner was also very close with the Beecher family, with Harriet Beecher

\[160\] Foner & Pacheco, 116.

\[161\] Foner & Pacheco, 116.

\[162\] O’Connor, 20.
Stowe donating $1,000 of her proceeds from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to support the school, as well as H.W. Beecher and William H. Beecher playing an integral role in the institution through being named trustees of the Miner Normal School for Colored Girls.¹⁶³ Miner was also well connected with Horace Mann, and her educational philosophy was most likely influenced by Mann’s educational philosophy, and Horace Mann’s wife also occasional lectured at Miner’s school.¹⁶⁴ Miner’s association with these prominent people not only ensured the success of her school through their financial contributions and management of the school, but also through the way they could vocally support her cause on a national scale. One could argue that without this social capital, Miner’s legacy could easily have slipped through the cracks of history.

As Lester Grosvenor Wells writes, in 1860 the 36ᵗʰ Congress was faced with the decision of what to do with African American education in DC. In response to arguments against African American education, Senator Henry Wilson, a personal friend of Miner and member the board of the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth of Massachusetts stated:

> There is a noble woman here in Washington teaching colored girls; and if the senator for Mississippi and the senator from Virginia visited that school and saw the culture there, if they would not be proud of it and thank God that these darkened minds were being cultivated by the efforts of philanthropy, I misunderstand these gentlemen altogether.¹⁶⁵

Through this passage, one can see how because of Miner’s prominent acquaintances, she had influential people who did have the influence to shape African American education in regions other than just Washington, DC. Thus, Miner did not have to do the work of creating her school

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¹⁶³ O’Connor, 61.

¹⁶⁴ O’Connor, 93.

¹⁶⁵ Wells, 371.
and promoting African American education alone, as she was privileged enough to have a circle
of friends who had similar philosophies and had the financial means to assist her.

Yet, despite this privileged position, there is no tension that arises in the memory of her
due to her race. For example, in an 1881 article in The Christian Recorder, the author said of
Miner: “During the year 1852 a woman of medium size, blooming countenance…came to
Washington, and amid the trials of that period established a school for the increased and
diffusion of knowledge among our race.”166 Throughout the article she speaks only praise for
Myrtilla Miner and reflects that Miss Miner would be proud if she were still alive and could see
how successful her school was. She concludes the article with the following sentence: “Let us all
feel thankful to God for putting it in his heart of that good woman to establish such a school,
where by young women will be trained and fitted for the responsible duties they will have to
encounter in their own schoolroom.”167 Even in the 2017 Founders Day Celebration, it is clear
that UDC sees Miner as an integral part of Black History Month. Speakers reiterated the fact that
they should give thanks to Miner for laying the foundation of this school that once served to
solely educate African Americans when there were no other educational opportunities, because
without this foundation UDC could not be the university that it is today, and that is a university
focused on diversity and education for all students.168

As previously mentioned, on more than one occasion, Miner was described as a “martyr”
for what she thought was right. On several occasions, she wrote letters to her family members
concerned about her health, even stating at one point while teaching in Mississippi that: “If I am

166 Daniel, 42.
167 Daniel, 42.
168 “2017 Founders Day Celebration.”
obliged to return home before the year is half gone, a poor miserable invalid, you may bless yourself that another slave is sacrificed to your emolument.”169 Over the course of her teaching career, Myrtilla Miner has been sent home to die, flown across the country to receive specialized treatment, and taken several months off to try to restore her health. Perhaps it is primarily for this reason, in addition to her status as a white woman, that Miner is remembered in such a heroic manner. She literally worked herself to her death in the pursuit of educating African American women.

Additionally, it is thanks to Ellen O’Connor’s A Memoir we even have such a detailed record of Miner’s life at all, as this is the only book written entirely about Miss Miner. In addition to giving a detailed account of Miner’s life and process for the founding of the school, O’Connor also includes an entire chapter on her personal traits. Throughout this chapter, O’Connor cited letters from personal friends and acquaintances of Miner, who had nothing but praise for her. It is in this chapter that the reader also learns that not only did Miner dedicate her life to the cause of educating African American women, but for all women in general: “the liberation of the negro must come first, and then the enfranchisement of woman.”170 From this Memoir, all aspects of Miner’s life are permanently stamped in history.

Aside from Ellen O’Connor’s Memoir, the most influential contribution to Miner’s legacy arrived in the form of a collection letters and other papers of Myrtilla Miner gifted to the Library of Congress in September 1952. After the acquisition of this collection, which numbered about 400 pieces, the Library of Congress issued a Press Release announcing “Miss Miner’s

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170 O’Connor, 117.
difficulties in obtaining her own education and the frustrations she met in her efforts to teach slave children in the South contributed to the missionary zeal with which she set about founding the school for free Negroes in the Nation’s Capital in 1851.”171 It is important to note that the acquisition of this collection came just a year after the Miner Teachers College Centennial Celebration, and perhaps not coincidental that Miss Sophia Albe, who previously owned the collection, decided to donate it to the Library of Congress at that point in time. As explained in Chapter 3, administrators at Miner Teachers College used the Centennial Celebration as a way to link Miner’s ideology with the movement towards integration. Perhaps, Miss Albe concluded, if people actually had access to Miner’s personal documents, they would be able to see how personally committed to this idea of educational equity, and thus use it to reason that if Miner were still alive, she would want to see Miner Teachers College and Wilson Teachers College integrated. Interestingly enough, it is in this press release that reveals the only potentially negative character trait Miner possessed: her uncompromising attitude, which “antagonized officials and the families of students, [and] was a factor in the school’s early difficulties.”172 Yet, even this is just an indicator of her strong desire to start her school, and ensure it succeeded.

These two sources form the basis of almost all the knowledge we have of Myrtilla Miner, and other articles or sections in books written about her heavily cite the Memoir, which also relies heavily on Miner’s letter correspondences. This is evident through the 1949 article Sadie Daniel wrote on Miner, in which she stated the purpose being to reveal the educational philosophy of Miner at the Miner Teachers College approached its centennial. Early in the


article, Daniel notes that other than a speech, Miner left behind no educational publications, and that O’Connor’s Memoir is valuable for the understanding of Miner’s philosophy and procedures.\textsuperscript{173} Understanding this concept is particularly valuable to the ways in which historical figures are remembered, and what is remembered versus what is left out. For example, in the chapter in the Memoir on Miner’s personal traits, the reader also learns that Miner spent time singing in prisons to uplift the prisoners, and that every Fourth of July she wrote a protest against celebration because the equality and independence celebrated on that day excluded women.\textsuperscript{174} However, nowhere else in my study of Miner did I find out about these facts, and that is because the sole way Miner’s memory has been used throughout history is for the uplift of African Americans. This demonstrates the way that people can selectively create and shape the memory of a person or event throughout history.

\textsuperscript{173} Daniel, 31.
\textsuperscript{174} O’Connor, 117.
Conclusion

“There is something touchingly impressive in the life and purpose of Miss Miner. . .In this selfish world—with its grasping and jostling throng—she seemed like some angel ministrant on her mission of mercy. On the dark background of the nation’s history it seemed an illuminated picture resplendent with truthfulness and love. Her life of romantic incident was at once redolent and beautiful. It was in itself a sweet poem, a living evangel of a heart yearning towards humanity, and filled with a sublime trust in God.”—Senator Henry Wilson

When one walks onto UDC’s campus, there is no large statue of Myrtilla Miner, like Georgetown University has of John Carroll as a daily reminder of its founder. However, through the practice of institutional rituals (in the case of UDC, Founder’s day celebrations), the institution now known and UDC celebrates Miner and what she has done. Myrtilla Miner represents much more than just a figurehead upon which an institution can trace its origin. She represents what is seen across the board as the founder of the higher education movement for African Americans in the District of Columbia. Countless scholars credit her with this honor, which is a title she very much deserves.

This celebration, an annual gathering of UDC students and alumni, began all the way back in 1933 with the Miner Normal School, which often included plays dedicated to Miner and always concluded with a pilgrimage to her gravesite. When UDC officially opened its doors in 1977, they were faced with the challenge of creating their identity, and did not hold close to their founder’s legacy. While initially successful, over the years UDC faced a lot of setbacks. In the face of massive budget cuts, a high principal turnover rate, and a drop in enrollment, UDC held its first Founders Day Celebration, entitled “A Unique History, A Rich History.” By doing this, UDC was able to bring back Miner’s memory from the brink of extinction, and use it as something to hold onto and be proud of as an ode to their historic past, and a nod to their future potential. The president of UDC, Ronald Mason, Jr. opened this year’s Founders Day celebration stating that institutions are often born and reborn again, and reflect the ever-evolving state they
reside in. Speakers at this year’s Founders Day Celebration emphasized the importance of a strong public institution and the importance of the educated becoming the educator and investing in the DC residents. One UDC alumni stated “The world sent me here when everything else was closed.” The keynote speaker reflected on his own time at UDC and mentioned how, had it not been for the university and the knowledge and support the faculty and staff provided, he would not currently be the president of a university. In these testimonials, we see a recurrence of the same ideals that inspired Myrtilla Miner way back in 1951.

This thesis sets the groundwork for exploring the origins of universities, particularly universities whose histories predate the Civil War. The next step for research in this particular topic would be to do an analysis of the teachers Miner trained, and the schools some of her students may have created to gain an overall understanding of her entire legacy, and if her mission was realized. All in all, as Sam Doku stated in his 2002 article: “The enslaved women could not afford higher education in 1851 when Dr. Miner founded her college, and in 2002, still there are people in the District who could not afford college if UDC was not available.”

Although published fifteen years ago, this sentiment still remains true, especially as witnessed through the 2017 Founders Day Celebration. Speakers and students featured on the celebration video all echoed a similar sentiment that through UDC, they were able to achieve their higher education goals. While the celebration itself has become further removed from a celebration of Miner’s life through the years, it is this higher education accessibility narrative that has remained. All of this work boils down to understanding how memory, education, and race all tie in together. Considering the recent rise in institutions revisiting their history and often having to find ways to reconcile their often-troubled racist pasts with the actions of the founders they proudly proclaim, the study of institutional memory is especially important. For example, we
have our own personal example at Georgetown University, where the revelation of the sale of 272 slaves to pay off the university’s debts forced Georgetown to come up with a working group on slavery and memory, rename a building after one of the slaves, and create initiatives to work through this past. Similarly, in recent years students at Princeton University began to question and challenge the University’s use of Woodrow Wilson’s name, even in light of his ardent support for segregation. In both of these examples, we see universities having to come to terms with their troubled pasts, and sometimes even question whether or not the good work of some of their founders overshadows their pasts. Universities have a symbiotic relationship with their pasts: individuals help build institutions and that through processes of institutional building beyond the control of that individual and often well after their deaths, institutions then do the labor of helping to mold and maintain the memory of that individual in a manner that helps to maintain or lift the reputation of the institution.
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