Blacking Up the Ivory Tower: Blackface Minstrelsy in College Life at Georgetown University

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Honors Thesis Submitted to the

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6 May 2019
Acknowledgements

Luck is nearly as important to the researching and writing of history as it is to betting. This past year, luck has been on my side. Yes, I was lucky to have found the incredibly interesting and rich documents in the Georgetown University archives that I did. But more fortunately, I was lucky to have the support time and time again of many brilliant people.

At different points throughout the school year, the Vegas odds were certainly against the on-time completion of this thesis. And yet, there have been those who took the action, who bet on me. I want to thank those people.

Thank you to Prof. Katherine Benton-Cohen who read my work, tweeted at me, and opened her home to me. For a whole year, she treated me always with generosity and candor. Thank you to Prof. Adam Rothman who inspired me to write a thesis and to study history at Georgetown in the first place. Thank you Prof. Rothman for encouraging me, advising me, teaching me to avoid teleological thinking. You demonstrated to me how a historian sees a narrative in every artifact and taught me that ultimately the best historians are great storytellers.

Thank you to the other souls and minds I’ve had the pleasure of interacting with in the History Department: thank you to Prof. Brian Taylor for pointing out to me the ironies of American life in the 19th century; to Prof. Marcia Chatelain for advising me not to go looking for heroes in history; to Prof. Karen Hammerschlag who taught me how to write about art history; to Daniel Cano for showing me why one should never assume anything about who had power in the past because of who has power today. Thank you to Professors James Collins, Bryan McCann, Joe McCartin, Tommaso Astarita, and Amy Leonard for your wisdom.

I owe a deep intellectual debt to all the scholars I cite in this project but specifically to Eric Lott and also to Ariel De La Fuente. Lott’s work about minstrelsy and De La Fuente’s about Argentinian history unveiled the power that exists in songs, theater, and stories.

I owe even more to university archivists Lynn Conway and Ann Galloway whose enthusiasm for the project nearly exceeded my own. Practically speaking, this thesis is only possible because of their counsel and patience.

Thank you to Lisa Rauschart, my high school history teacher, who taught me that history worth studying happened right here.

Thank you to my peers in the honors program for inspiring me. Thank you specifically to Meredith Duflock, Sam Zarroff, Synie Sousa, Matt Zezula, and Brett Voyles. Thanks to my roommates for putting up with recordings of minstrel music and stacks of books left on our windowsill for months. Thanks to the Georgetown Improv Association for teaching me firsthand how humor works. Thanks to Emma Stern for listening to me talk about books I barely understood.

Finally, thank you to my family. Thank you to my mom for reading for typos, to my dad for sharing stories of his own thesis writing, and to my sister for her patience. Yes, you support me materially and created me biologically speaking--but in so many other ways, I wouldn’t be the person I am without you.

I give permission to Lauinger Library to make this thesis available to the public.

1 My guess is that that sentiment smacks of someone who aspires to be an historian...and has never gambled.
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Introduction

“Gentleman, Be Seated!”

The topic of this thesis is the tradition of blackface minstrelsy, a deeply racist and dreadfully popular theater form that dominated American stages from its inception in the 1830s into the twentieth century. Thus, for better or for worse, I will begin by taking up an early conceit of minstrelsy: the haughty interlocutor. The interlocutor was one performer in the minstrel troupe who played a role apart. Acting as a sort of master of ceremonies, the interlocutor’s contested authority invoked the ringmaster of the circus industry from which minstrelsy sprung (and even the slavemaster). Condescending to the rest of the troupe, the interlocutor began the show by posing questions in the fussiest language to the other minstrels who answered with raunchy witticisms that showed the hightalking interlocutor to be the real rube amongst the group. That is, he was the butt of the joke. Although this format depended for its laughs on the racist assumption that different kinds of Americans possessed different kinds of knowledge, it also suggested something radical: first, that things are not as they seem (perhaps this is the watchword of the minstrel show); and, second, that questions can inspire spectacle. It was a question that set the whole thing going. Therefore, I will begin with a question for you:

How would you explain what it means to be American to a stranger?

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2 This was the typical announcement of the interlocutor with which he begun the show. I wish to channel invoke that moment not to celebrate the interlocutor--who was the leader of the racist parody that was the minstrel show--but because his attempt at control over his subject was constantly interrupted, subverted, and nuanced which is what good history writing should do to established understandings of the past. See Rhae Lynn Barnes’ discussion of figure of the interlocutor in Ed Ayers et al., “The Faces of Racism,” Backstory (Charlottesville, VA: A Program of Virginia Humanities, February 8, 2019), [https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism/](https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism/).

Quick—you whip out your wallet to flash a license and a crisp dollar bill. Too crass? Perhaps, you’d gather your thoughts and recount your own family history with asides about opportunity and the American dream. Perhaps you pontificate on what freedom means to you. Or maybe this is the moment when your pocket Constitution will come in handy (finally!). Most of us don’t know how we’d explain our Americanness because we’ve never had to explain ourselves—indeed, that strikes me as essentially American.

It is at the encounter with the other that one must choose how to define oneself. This sentiment seems obvious in our post-colonial, post-modernist world—but I’m not asking a question of theory. I want to know what you’d really say or show to a person completely ignorant of the United States.

Just such a situation presented itself in 1854. That spring, Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Harbor on his mission to open Japan to trade with the United States. A Japanese convoy came to meet Perry on board his lead ship. As part of this inaugural act of diplomacy, a cultural exchange took place aboard Perry’s ship. On deck, the Japanese ambassadors staged a kabuki ceremony for the seafaring Americans. Next came the Americans’ turn to represent themselves to their Japanese counterparts: so, Perry’s white sailors performed a minstrel skit in blackface. Each side would later describe the other as barbaric.4

Blackface minstrelsy originated as a dramatic form during the 1830s in the theaters of the urban, working-class North. Blackface minstrels were the performers of blackface minstrelsy, usually white men who, having blackened their faces with burnt cork or grease paint to imitate

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African Americans, performed comic songs, dances, and satirical skits. It was an appropriative, deeply racist practice but, on that day in March 1854, it was the singular way by which Perry’s white sailors chose to demonstrate America to people who knew them not. Yes, for some scholars blackface minstrelsy means the genesis of the show business industry, or the first authentic artifact of an American folk culture, or the first American pop-culture export. But, as is obvious in this anecdote, it was more than that and meant something different to Commodore Perry’s crew: it was the best answer they could give to the question of American identity.

By the middle of the nineteenth century when Perry arrived in Japanese waters, white Americans understood the theatrical conventions of blackface minstrelsy well enough for a regiment of professional sailors—not professional actors or musicians—to put on a minstrel show themselves for an important occasion. The theater form had already deeply penetrated American culture. A Japanese folding screen with paneled images of that fateful day depicts the American sailors dancing and singing, wearing blackface as well as white-and-blue pinstripe suits with red.

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5 The history of African American blackface performers is also long, beginning in the 1850s. Most historians begin this tradition with African American performer Charles “Barney” Hicks and his minstrel troupe called the Georgia Minstrels. On account of the celebrity of Hicks’ troupe, “Georgia” in the name of minstrel troupes came to commonly connote that the blackface performers were actually African American. For discussions of Charles Hicks see: Eileen Southern, “The Georgia Minstrels: The Early Years,” in Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth Century Blackface Minstrelsy (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 163–79. For discussions of African American blackface performers see: Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen, Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).

as if the moment’s diplomatic context was not enough, the sailors’ red, white, and blue outfits demonstrated how this theater form was for the sailors an act of patriotism.\footnote{See Image Appendix, Image 1.1-1.2. Unknown, \textit{Assembled Pictures of Commodore Perry’s Visit}, n.d., n.d., Tokyo University Historiographical Institute. For more on minstrelsy aboard Commodore Perry’s fleet and the relevant imagery see: Dower, John. “Black Ships & Samurai: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan (1853-1854).” Online at MIT: Visualizing Cultures, 2010.}

The red, white, and blue getups represented only an alternative\footnote{Ed Ayers et al., “The Faces of Racism,” \textit{Backstory} (Charlottesville, VA: A Program of Virginia Humanities, February 8, 2019), \url{https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism/}.} to the common garb of the minstrel. In the earliest shows, blackface minstrels dressed in ill-assorted, tattered clothing to invoke the enslaved people who were the objects of their scorn. T. D. Rice, considered the originator of the minstrel show and the creator of the character Jim Crow, claimed that for his first performance of Jim Crow he stole his costume right off the back of a bedraggled, black dockhand whom he left naked at the side of the stage.\footnote{Ayers et al. 2019.} Though certainly apocryphal, Rice told the story as a means of marketing himself and authenticating his show; the costume became proof of his proximity to blackness, even as his whiteness was what allowed for the cross-racial thrill and the derogatory humor of the show to work. Keeping in mind that minstrelsy’s primary objective was derisive racist comedy, minstrels’ costumes varied given the particular joke they were making. Thus, as often as minstrels dressed down in the rags of degraded characters like Jim Crow, they gussied up in exaggerated versions of their day’s high fashion to lampoon black characters who affected the appearance of middle-class whites.\footnote{Eric Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995). 18-19.} Of course, this dandy character revealed through his behavior that his costume was just that: no matter his clothes, the black caricature could never belong in the sophisticated milieu at which he pretended.\footnote{Barbara Lewis, “Daddy Blue: The Evolution of the Dark Dandy,” in \textit{Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth Century Blackface Minstrelsy} (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 265.} The lyrics of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{8} Ed Ayers et al., “The Faces of Racism,” \textit{Backstory} (Charlottesville, VA: A Program of Virginia Humanities, February 8, 2019), \url{https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism/}.
\item \textbf{9} Ayers et al. 2019.
\item \textbf{12} Lewis, “Daddy Blue: The Evolution of the Dark Dandy,” 265.
\end{itemize}
minstrel songs and the plots of minstrel skits punished this character for his class transgression; the audience laughed.

But that day the sailors opted for the third type of minstrel costume: extravagant tuxedos, even more garish than those of the dandy type, loud with the colors of the flag. The outfits asserted a common antebellum understanding of minstrelsy within industry literature, amongst white enthusiasts, and in the press: that it was the prototypical American artform. That day, the sailors traded one national outfit--US Navy uniforms--for another.

I begin with this anecdote primarily because it shows how wildly popular blackface minstrelsy was and how incredibly far it reached. What’s more, the extreme circumstances and distant location suggest that white Americans put on minstrel shows in more places than historians have counted and for reasons that historians have passed over. Yes, this particular example has found its way into the historiography of blackface minstrelsy--specifically, Robert C. Toll recounts this show in his 1974 tome *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, the first modern history of the theater form.13 But this example is so outlandish and occurred at a moment of such historiographic attention that its inclusion in the historiographic record serves as an exception to the rule.

The rule has been for historians to focus on blackface minstrelsy in the urban centers of the antebellum North--New York City, Boston, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia. The subjects of these studies have been the working-class white men who made up the minstrel audiences those cities and the professional minstrels who entertained them. But this anecdote recounts an amateur show halfway across the world from the Bowery of Manhattan; the anecdote stars participants who, at

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least by the nature of their military service at the time of the show, were not the same as the urban working class folk on whom the historiography focuses. This is the kind of minstrel show--one that contrasts in setting and subject with the traditional historiographic prototype--that I have researched for my thesis.

Rather than examine those shows that took place in the antebellum, working-class theater houses of the urban North, my research has tracked a tradition of amateur minstrelsy not just before but during and after the Civil War and in an elite space: at Georgetown University in Washington, D. C.

Blackface minstrelsy, typically approached by its historians as a low-culture, working class, folk theater form, also flourished in an elite space like Georgetown University. At Georgetown, minstrelsy was popular, celebrated, and important to communal life for a very long time. The tradition of blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown suggests that the dichotomy between high culture and low culture is only a dichotomy historians imposed on the past. For the boys at Georgetown--who would pen poems in Greek alongside poems in pejorative “darky” dialect, who would act in Hamlet and then in a blackface send-up called Gimlet weeks later--the distinction didn’t seem to matter at all. They did not understand blacking-up as contradictory to their identity as budding classical scholars, observant Catholics, or young white American elites.

To find my argument compelling, one must first understand approach modern scholars have taken to the history of blackface minstrelsy, which I will lay out in the historiography that follows this section. In short, historians have consistently framed blackface minstrelsy as an icon of working class, folk, or popular culture.
Then, one must understand that Georgetown during the time I write about it does not reflect the communities in which historians typically investigate working class, popular, or folk culture. Rather, Georgetown represented an elite space. Community members themselves understood it as such, often referencing the prestige of their own institution. They weren’t wrong. From the first collegiate minstrel show that I document in the 1860s through to the last that I investigate in 1950, the Georgetown boys who would have performed and attended represented a political and cultural elite class of white, Catholic Americans. At the middle of the nineteenth century, Georgetown community members had for the most part been born into privilege and maintained privileged status: for example, of those alumni who served in the Civil War, 16% were born to fathers who were doctors and another 56.4% were born to fathers who were lawyers, career politicians, or career military officials; of the alumni themselves who fought on both sides of the Civil War, 40% became doctors and another 37% were lawyers, career politicians, or career military officials. Before the end of the nineteenth century,

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14 For example, in John Gilmary Shea’s centennial history of Georgetown published in 1889, a book I will make a lot out of in this thesis, he explains his project as “the history of an institution that initiated, however humbly, the higher education of Catholics in the United States, and whose development has always been closely linked with the general progress of college and university teaching in our country, as it cannot be lacking in permanent interest to scholars, can never be considered untimely.” See: John Gilmary Shea, Memorial of the First Century of Georgetown College, D. C.: Comprising a History of Georgetown University (New York, NY: P. F. Collier, 1891), https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=YdRAAAAAIAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP11, 20.

15 For the entirety of my historical review (1861-1950), the student body and the faculty were all men. Georgetown college first admitted women as undergraduates in 1969. The college first hired a woman to the faculty, Dorothy Brown to the history department, a few years prior in 1966 and began hiring women to the faculty in higher numbers by the end of the decade. The university itself had been coeducational since 1903, when the School of Nursing opened, the student body of which was composed almost entirely women through the 1960s. See: Robert Emmett Curran, A History of Georgetown University: The Rise to Prominence 1964-1989, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010). 12-13, 73.

outsiders also understood Georgetown as an elite space. The *New York Herald* reported on Georgetown’s commencement ceremony in 1874: “Today the beautiful grounds [of Georgetown] were thronged with so much of the elite of the District’s society...The Marine Band, in full force, were engaged, and during the morning, entertained the throng of visitors gathered on the College green.” Even forgetting that the *Herald* describes the community as “elite,” the fact that its editors in New York found Georgetown’s commencement ceremony newsworthy—as did the editors of the *New York Tablet*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Boston Pilot*, and Brooklyn’s *Catholic Review* in addition to Washington-based papers—demonstrates the college’s growing cultural prominence.

To be clear, I am not celebrating Georgetown for its elite status in the past—congratulations to the class of 1874 that made the *Boston Pilot*. But the college’s elite status does matter insofar as my argument about the significance of blackface minstrelsy in such a space. The historiography elides stories of this racist theater in spaces like Georgetown, performed by and for people like its students. This story serves as one, specific historical example—one wrinkle from the past—that mucks up the binary between high culture and popular culture, between highbrow and lowbrow.

I am by no means the first person to challenge this historiographic binary. This trend in American history began outright with Lawrence Levine’s 1988 book *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* in which Levine details the divide in American popular culture between so-called “highbrow” and “lowbrow” forms each corresponding

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different parts of society, their origins, and the history of the bifurcation of the American entertainment industry in the twentieth century.\(^{19}\)

Let me note here the slight difference between the work Levine—a scholar of jovial demeanor and extreme importance to the American academy generally—did and the work that I—a ‘scholar’ only finishing an undergraduate thesis—am doing. Levine showed how so-called lowbrow cultural forms engaged with highbrow ones. For example, Levine calls attention to the frequent references nineteenth century blackface minstrels (who he and other twentieth century cultural critics consider lowbrow performers) made to Shakespeare’s work (considered highbrow material by twentieth cultural critics).\(^{20}\) Thus, Levine proved that nineteenth working class people (those that he assumes were minstrelsy’s enthusiasts) engaged with and understood what in the twentieth century came to be considered highbrow material. Even though my scope is far narrower, I follow Levine’s example and point out a particular breach in the binary between highbrow and lowbrow—but my argument goes the opposite way. I demonstrate how elites at Georgetown in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were as comfortable with lowbrow cultural forms like minstrelsy as Levine says the nineteenth century working class was with what would later be classified as highbrow forms.

Even beyond demonstrating that elites like those of the Georgetown community also engaged in blackface minstrelsy, I want to show that the theater form was in fact important to the community members and to the life of the community. Minstrelsy was part and parcel of the


\(^{20}\) This is Levine’s own example and in fact the example that he explains inspired his entire project. But the example itself demonstrates the way that scholars have considered blackface minstrelsy a lowbrow form. See: Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 4-8.
rituals of the school year--academic, extra-curricular, and Catholic. Georgetown faculty supported minstrel shows; Georgetown publications published minstrel literature. Georgetown students localized and personalized the songs and skits and jokes for the Georgetown community specifically. They customized their material and, thus, were that much more connected to the shows. Even as Georgetown students personalized minstrelsy, the blackface minstrelsy done at Georgetown was the legitimate, standard version of the theater form. That is, the blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown I document resembles the blackface minstrelsy other historians have documented elsewhere. Minstrelsy at Georgetown did the kind of cultural work that scholars have argued blackface minstrelsy did in other contexts. Just as scholars have argued it did in different class contexts, blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown allowed its white participants to engage with the politics of their day, to assert and reassure their own whiteness, to assuage the emotional challenges of their historical moment, and to play out cultural conflict.

I will organize my argument thematically rather than chronologically. These themes will include minstrelsy’s importance to campus culture and official status within it; minstrelsy as a site of political conflict and cultural conflict and how students used the minstrel stage and blackface mask to speak what normally could not be spoken on campus; the minstrel show and the turning of the seasons at Georgetown; the harmony of highbrow and lowbrow material at Georgetown and the obvious comfortability of these elites with so-called lowbrow material; and the passion of Georgetown students’ for the form.

Moving back and forth in time, we will explore moments particularly evocative of these themes in the nearly century-long history of minstrel shows at Georgetown documented in the university archives. In my first chapter, “Our Lady of Fatima Shines: The Primacy and Proximity
of Blackface Minstrelsy at Georgetown,” I will explore the 1950 minstrel show fundraiser of the Senior Class Committee to demonstrate the endurance and popularity of minstrelsy on campus.

In my second chapter “Contraband: Minstrelsy and the Civil War at Georgetown,” we will visit the Georgetown campus in the midst of the Civil War to explore the political implications of minstrel shows and how they presented an unique opportunity for political discourse.

In my third chapter, “Home Again: How Minstrelsy Welcomed Young Men Into Their New World,” we will travel to the Welcome Banquet for new students in 1922 and probe the emotional and psychological work relating to nostalgia and unruliness that minstrel material did for Georgetown students on their journey toward manhood.

In my fourth and final chapter, “‘Down the Dear Dusky Line: Blackface Minstrels Around the Year, Blackface Minstrels Do It All,” we will review the college’s Thanksgiving concert in 1885, its extravagant festivities for Mardi Gras 1891, and Christmas celebrations at the turn of the century to explore how minstrel shows helped mark the changing of the seasons at Georgetown. We will investigate how myriad student organizations staged minstrel shows through the first half of the nineteenth century and reveal the way in which blackface performance existed in perfect harmony with their other endeavors as young elites.

In the historiography and the four following chapters, through general historical context, theoretical scholarship on minstrelsy, and close-reading, the meaning and importance of each of these aspects of Georgetown history will become clear.
Who are the folk in “folk culture?”: What we talk about when we talk about the Historiography of Blackface Minstrelsy

On an afternoon in the spring semester of 1960 at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, activist-singer Pete Seeger, performing one of his travelling “community concerts,” finished a banjo medley. As he finished, Seeger began to speak about the songs he’d just performed. He continued plucking softly beneath his words: “Of these three...the last one, ['Old Dan Tucker'] a lot of people think is an old folk song,” explained Pete Seeger. “But actually it was a pop song, it was on the hit parade on the year 1844.” The audience of undergraduates and professors erupted in laughter.

But, Seeger was not so wrong: “Old Dan Tucker” can be called a “pop song” of the 1840s; it should also be remembered that it was a minstrel song. Seeger went on to mention a second and even more famous minstrel song: Stephen Foster’s “Oh, Susanna!”

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21 Wait! What exactly was blackface minstrelsy? Blackface minstrelsy was a popular theater genre that, after its inception in the 1830s, dominated American stages for one hundred years. Minstrels--(mostly) white American men who wore burnt cork on their face to imitate African Americans-- performed a medley of instrumental music, song, dance, comedic sketches, and satirical oratory in shows that foregrounded crass racial humor and underhanded social commentary. “Old Dan Tucker,” the song I’ll discuss at this paper’s beginning, was one of many popular songs of the nineteenth century written for the minstrel stage.

22 Seeger, Banjo Medley: Cripple Creek, Old Joe Clark, Old Dan Tucker.

23 Obviously, Seeger’s performance of the song in 1960, one-hundred-and-forty-eight years after it was written by Dan Emmett (see page 182 of Jim Crow, American), is a testament to its enduring popularity. Want a testament to this song’s popularity in its own time? How about this: In 1853, T. D. Rice--commonly believed to be the originator of both the character of Jim Crow and the art form of blackface minstrelsy itself--wrote Otello, a so-called “burlesque opera,” a long-form satirical musical play to be performed in blackface of Shakespeare’s Othello. The finale of Otello, its final song, is set to the music of “Old Dan Tucker,” employing the well-known song’s tune and rhyme scheme to conclude its own story with new lyrics. See: Lhamon, Jr., Jim Crow, American: Selected Songs and Plays. 157.

24 Mahar, Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture. 15.
“Dan Tucker’ was the biggest hit of the decade until ‘Oh, Susanna!’ came on in the year of 1848,” Seeger continued. “‘Dan Tucker’ was just such a good song it entered into the folk tradition at the time. I’m of the opinion that for all we know some pop song from our generation just might, by some accident, be so good that it also might last a million years.”

Again, Seeger was met with laughter.

If you are shocked to learn of the enlightened Pete Seeger singing minstrel tunes to liberal arts undergraduates in the thick of the Civil Rights era, what do you make of the fact that Bruce Springsteen recorded his own version of “Old Dan Tucker” in 2006? What do we say about the recordings of “Oh, Susanna!” and other famous minstrel songs by twentieth and twenty-first century musicians the likes of James Taylor, The Byrds, Neil Young, Louis Armstrong, Itzhak Perlman, Hank Williams, Paul Robeson, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Randy Newman? The most famous of minstrel tunes-- “Oh, Susanna!,” “Camp Town Races,” “Old Folks at Home,”--are now in the twenty-first century assigned to the genre of

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26 Bruce Springsteen, Old Dan Tucker, MP3, We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions (Columbia, 2006).
28 The Byrds, Oh! Susanna, MP3, Turn! Turn! Turn! (Columbia, 1965).
29 Neil Young and Crazy Horse, Oh! Susanna, Americana (Reprise, 2012).
31 Itzhak Perlman, Old Folks at Home, MP3, Itzhak Perlman’s Greatest Hits (Warner Classics, 1998).
33 Paul Robeson, Old Folks at Home (Sewanee River), MP3, Paul Robeson: The Complete EMI Sessions 1928-1939 (Warner Classics, 2008).
34 Johnny Cash, My Old Kentucky Home, MP3, John R. Cash (Columbia, 1974).
children’s music and lullabies. Songs composed for the banjo and the bones, written for the working-class theater house stages of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, New York and Boston, songs that toured across the sea to acclaim in London and Paris, through the sleepy Mississippi Valley and out in the new frontier towns, today—or more precisely, tonight—rendered wordless and soft—will rock American babes to sleep. That James Taylor, et. al. recorded their versions of the preeminent minstrel song “Oh, Susanna!”—the song scholars have deemed “the summation of blackface song craft”—without the verse that jokes about the electrocution of “five hundred nigger” only testifies to the resilience of the minstrel tradition even as popular culture surrounding race has changed. Perhaps Seeger was correct when he suggested that these songs would last for “a million years.”

The anecdote about Seeger as well as the litany of famous contemporary artists who have sung minstrel songs demonstrates that blackface minstrelsy is an important, long standing tradition in American life. It is thus a worthy subject of study for those who wish to understand American life. Indeed, the frequency with which historians of blackface minstrelsy feel the need to remind their readers of the worthiness of their subject matter is nearly undignified—and now

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37 The 2002 children’s album Songs for Kids (Vol. 1) by the Goanna Gang includes a version of “Oh, Susanna!” the song Eric Lott called “the summation of blackface song craft” (Love and Theft, 203) and “Camptown Races.” The album also includes “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah,” a song which was originally composed for the 1946 Disney movie Song of the South. Though not performed in blackface, the Disney song employs traditional minstrel tropes and themes, especially with regards to the character of “Uncle Remus.” Another example of the early crossover of minstrel music into the genre of children’s music is the 1974 EP Mr. Pickwick’s Minstrel Show. For more on Song of the South see: Taylor and Austen, Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop, 219.

38 Lott, Love and Theft, 203.

39 Lott, Love and Theft, 204.

40 Seeger, Banjo Medley: Cripple Creek, Old Joe Clark, Old Dan Tucker.

41 It seems to me that this chip on the shoulder of historians of blackface minstrelsy traces back to the same dichotomy between high and low culture in American history of which blackface minstrelsy was a product and to which it was a response. For more on blackface minstrelsy as a low-brow see Lawrence Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/georgetown/detail.action?docID=3300321.
I’ve gone ahead and continued that embarrassing tradition myself. I didn’t mean to; or rather, that is not why I’ve begun this way.

I’ve begun with Seeger’s words for an entirely different reason: his analysis of “Old Dan Tucker” exemplifies the way Americans have often talked about blackface minstrelsy. When Seeger emphasizes the popularity of the song;\(^4^2\) when he speaks to his theory of how it entered the “folk tradition,”;\(^4^3\) when he relates the song to Rock n’ Roll and connects it to the popular culture of his own moment, and then imagines an American future;\(^4^4\) in each of these moves, Seeger recommences trends in the *historiography* of blackface minstrelsy. That is, whether he knows it or not, he is repeating established ways that blackface minstrelsy has been remembered and gets told. Seeger’s comments lay bare what is really being talked about in every history and analysis of the topic: every commentary on blackface minstrelsy has, ultimately, been a commentary on the beast that is American culture.

The telling of blackface minstrelsy--its historiography--is contemporaneous to the artform itself. That is, for almost as long as there have been minstrel shows, there have been written histories of the minstrel tradition.\(^4^5\) Journalists and blackface performers themselves penned stories of the true origins of blackface minstrelsy all throughout the antebellum period. In fact, Seeger’s comments follow in a vein established by these early histories: just as Seeger

\[^{4^2}\] “[‘Old Dan Tucker’] a lot of people think is an old folk song but actually it was a *pop* song, it was on the hit parade on the year 1844.” See: Seeger, *Banjo Medley: Cripple Creek, Old Joe Clark, Old Dan Tucker*.

\[^{4^3}\] “Dan Tucker’ was just such a good song it entered into the folk tradition at the time.” See: Seeger, *Banjo Medley: Cripple Creek, Old Joe Clark, Old Dan Tucker*.

\[^{4^4}\] “I’m of the opinion that for all we know some pop song from our generation just might, by some accident, be so good that it also might last a million years.” See: Seeger.

\[^{4^5}\] For an example of such an early long-form history of the origins of blackface minstrelsy as a theater practice, see James K. Kennard, Jr.’s 1845 essay “Who Are Our National Poets?” published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. 
emphasized the popularity of “Old Dan Tucker,” so too do the earliest accounts of minstrel shows belabor the wild popularity of the theater form.

As early as 1845, Journalist James K. Kennard in the New-York-based _Knickerbocker Magazine_ wrote that “the whole civilized world resounded [the] names” of Jim Crow and Zip Coon, the names of two minstrel characters. “Three hundred and fifty times a day (we took the pains to count, once) we have been amused and instructed by ‘Zip Coon’ [and] ‘Jim Crow…At no time does the atmosphere of our planet cease to vibrate harmoniously to the immortal songs of the negroes of America,” writes Kennard, his proclamation of blackface minstrelsy’s popularity reaching planetary proportions. I am ready to believe the omnipresence of blackface minstrelsy that Kennard details--a social craze the _New York Tribune_ described in 1855 as “insanity”--not only because of the wealth of sources that speak to similar circumstances but also because Kennard’s account seems to come from irritation: “At this present moment, a certain ubiquitous person seems to be in the way of the whole people of these United States simultaneously (a mere pretender, doubtless, dressed up in some cast-off negro clothing), and any one may hear him told a hundred times a day, to ‘Get out ob de way, old Dan Tucker!’”

Kennard seems nearly ticked off about it all. Even so, Kennard’s tongue-in-cheek commentary

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47 Kennard, 55.
48 Lott, 5.
49 Kennard, 55.
on blackface minstrelsy’s popularity fails to conceal some pride in the dominance of this American form over the entirety of the “planet.”

Here again, Kennard exemplifies a historiographic trend: the early chroniclers of blackface minstrelsy celebrated its international success. It was the first great American cultural export. “Jim Crow has found its way to Europe, and the imported Swiss musical boxes now play this national melody. Who ever thought that so distinguished an honor awaited Jim Crow?” coyly asked a reporter in the Indiana newspaper the *Richmond Palladium* in 1833. This Indiana reporter was not unique in the sly pride he took in the triumph of this New World form over the tastes of culture-consumers in the Old World. In an article titled “Jim Crow in England,” the *Morning Herald*, a New York daily, boasted in 1837 that the success of T. D. Rice—commonly believed to be the originator of both the character of Jim Crow and the art form of blackface minstrelsy itself—in London was so extraordinary that “he makes money like water.” The *Morning Herald* reporter mocked the reactions of the English public to the famous minstrel,

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50 Let me explain the joke: Kennard is making a play on the chorus of the popular minstrel song “Old Dan Tucker,” which instructs the blackface character Dan Tucker to “Get out de way!” (see lyrics in Lott, 143). Kennard cleverly says “a certain ubiquitous person,” referring to the character old Dan Tucker which is also the song title, is “in the way of the whole United States,” employing the language of the song to metaphorically make a point about the preoccupation of all Americans with the song specifically and the genre of blackface minstrelsy more broadly (as “Old Dan Tucker” serves in this case as synecdoche for blackface minstrelsy as a theater practice on the whole).

51 Kennard, 55.

52 “Richmond Palladium. (Richmond, Wayne County, Ind.) 1831-1837, November 16, 1833, Image 3.”

53 This *Richmond Palladium* reporter is describing an international cultural cycle: an American cultural form goes to Europe, succeeds, and is imported back into the United States. This is reminiscent of a cultural cycle I’ve noticed stateside, one I’d call the Circuit of Southern Mythology: northerners travel South, return north, and write and perform minstrel acts that propagate the Southern Plantation Mythology/Old South Mythology; then, those acts and songs travel across the country and southerners themselves take on those (originally Northern and imaginary) minstrel songs and acts as manifestations of a true Southern identity. The epitome of this cycle is the 1859 song “Dixie” by Dan Emmett, written and performed on the minstrel stage. In turn, the Confederacy later adopted this minstrel song as its anthem. See: Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America*.

54 And also: Lott, *Love and Theft*. 237.

fancifully recording their remarks on seeing T. D. Rice in the street: “The whole company stared. ‘That's the famous American Prince Jim Crow,’ said one. ‘That's the famous American Lord Jim Crow,’ said another. ‘That's the famous American Duke Jim Crow,’ said a third.” The report concludes, “Nothing like Jim Crow ever appeared in England before.” 55 Again the terms with which the author chooses to make clear the popularity of the form are nearly outlandish: the famous minstrel becomes “the famous American Prince.”

But there is a deeper meaning to the reporter’s choice of the language. The joke here relies on the contrast of the language of royalty and aristocracy with the figure of “Jim Crow,” whom the language describes. Firstly, the contrast on the surface between the dishonorable status of the character Jim Crow with such honorific titles is ridiculous. However, the language is ridiculous in a second and deeper way as well: the titles of “Prince,” “Lord,” and “Duke” don’t work because minstrelsy is understood to be characteristically American. Thus, titling Jim Crow, the representative figure of the democratic and anti-elitist genre, an “American Prince” is oxymoronic.

The nationalistic framing of blackface minstrelsy was a matter of pride for early historians of the genre. These writers, representative of many antebellum Americans, sought artistic practices that would articulate a unique American culture as decisively as the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 had articulated American political independence. 56 Repeatedly, writers of the nineteenth century referred to blackface minstrelsy, its music and shows, as the one true American artform, the American gift to the world pantheon of civilized art. This is why Kennard titled his essay on blackface minstrelsy “Who Are Our National Poets?”

55 Ibid.
56 I’m paraphrasing here from Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America. 3.
His answer: black-faced minstrels. They “are *American* melodists, *par excellence,*” he wrote (Kennard’s italics).58

The celebration of the national character of minstrelsy was often intended as a reproach to European condescension towards American arts. Thus begins the preface to an 1854 songbook of renowned minstrel E.P. Christy: “After our countrymen had, by force of native genius in the arts, arms, science, philosophy and poetry, &c, &c, confuted the stale cant of our European detractors that nothing original could emanate from Americans--the next cry was, that we have no NATIVE MUSIC;...until our countrymen found a triumphant vindicating APOLLO in the genius of E. P. Christy, who...was the first to catch our native airs as the floated wildly, or hummed in the balmy breezes of the sunny south.”59 In addition to showcasing the nationalist understanding of minstrelsy, this preface demonstrates well how an early historiography of minstrelsy evolved within a literature with explicit commercial aims. For example, this preface writes the history of minstrelsy by setting it within a context of hemispheric artistic rivalry (a true historian’s move) and originating it with E. P. Christy (whose song-book you should buy and songs you should sing!).

Books like Christy’s commonly included such historical analyses, which situated the songs, jokes, and scripts that were their true content. Although not a product of the academy,

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57 Kennard, 52.
58 Kennard, 55.
59 Interestingly enough, we see in much of this nineteenth century literature about blackface minstrelsy the international implications of theater practices that were shaped locally and idiosyncratically by specific places of origin, such as the particular ethnic enclaves of Manhattan. For a discussion of the way New York, specifically the Bowery and Catherine Markey, shaped minstrelsy see: W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
these commercial histories as well as the history-telling of journalists influenced the way
nineteenth century Americans understood minstrelsy and also the way that twentieth century
historians wrote about it. Just using this Christy preface as an example, we see two historical
claims about the origins of minstrelsy that later historians will dispute. The first is the
identification of E. P. Christy as the first blackface performer, a rather minor mistake and in its
context a wholly understandable one. But the second claim—that minstrelsy authentically
portrays a way of being that began originally and occurred naturally in the South—is one (false)
claim that tracks throughout the historiography. Indeed, historians as late as the 1990s had to
contest this claim; they argued that minstrel songs, skits, and speech were racist contrivance,
opposing a large literature that suggested that minstrelsy pinned down on song-sheet, on script,
and on stage what was a genuine African American culture.

The first book to attack this deeply racist suggestion was Robert C. Toll’s 1974 *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. Toll criticized blackface minstrelsy,
writing that its “portrayals of negroes [were in fact] shaped by white expectations and desires
and not by black realities.” Carrying out his critique of blackface minstrelsy as racist, Toll
concluded, “[blackface minstrelsy] embedded caricatures of blacks into America popular
culture” that persisted up to his writing of the book in the 1970s. A typical New Social historian
of his moment, Toll explained in the epilogue of his book how he was one of many scholars
(then) “searching for ways to uncover the history of ‘common people.’”

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61 See the relation of blackface minstrelsy to national opera in the letters compiled by Eric Lott (16) and in Alexander Saxton’s discussion of Mark Twain’s first impressions of minstrelsy (67).
62 Toll, vi.
63 Ibid.
64 Toll, 281.
book’s structure reveal this change in agenda from those works on minstrelsy that precede his. Earlier histories, be they laudatory catalogues like the 1911 *Monarchs of Minstrelsy, from Daddy Rice to Date* or the academically serious 1962 book by musicologist Hans Nathan’s *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Minstrelsy*, were written around specific performers— the ‘great men history’ of minstrelsy if you will. Instead, Toll investigated the songs “average Americans” sang, the stories they swapped, the jokes they laughed at, and the shows they watched in crowded theaters—in other words, “their folk culture”—in an effort to “recapture common people’s thoughts, concerns, desires, fears, and hopes.”

Although Toll explained his social historical aim “to reconstruct the lives of average Americans,” the priority he gives in his study to symbols and language rather than people prefigures the so-called “cultural turn” of the 1980s and 1990s. The “cultural turn” begat the field of cultural studies, the field to which the next landmark book on minstrelsy, Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft*, understands itself as both child and champion. The “cultural turn” legitimized historians of minstrelsy to do the work of symbolic analysis of minstrel song lyrics, jokes, and performance techniques that would previously have been the domain of their colleagues in the other departments of the Humanities (perhaps, just across the hall).

Despite Lott’s honest interest in where his own book fits within the burgeoning field of cultural studies, both his and Toll’s book only continued a pre-existing trend in the history of minstrelsy: a fascination-bordering-on-veneration of a folk or popular culture. This began in truth with Constance Rourke’s 1931 book of grand cultural ambition *American Humor*.

65 Ibid.  
67 Rourke’s *American Humor* also inaugurated a now established tradition in the writing of the history of minstrelsy: the introduction of social psychology and theater/humor theory into the analysis of what was happening at a minstrel
American Humor was born out of the ‘30s ethos to document a popular working-class culture thought to be dying with the changes of the Depression era, an ethos that led to the great works of James Agee, Walker Evans, Zora Neale Hurston, and other writers and folklorists.

Even so, Rourke’s passion for the popular had already been appealed to by a nostalgic corps of writers at the turn of the century who perceived the death of their beloved minstrel show to vaudeville and the newfangled “movie houses.”68 Of course, many of these writers understood the precious folk culture in minstrelsy that needed saving to be authentically black and Southern; Lott and others have worked to show us that, although minstrelsy is undeniably an artifact of American folklife, it is straightforwardly neither black nor southern but rather the cultural expression of the white and immigrant working class of the urban North.69

Indeed just as Toll’s and Lott’s modern reverence for the folk has its antecedents, so too does their comprehension and denunciation of minstrelsy’s overt racism. It is no shock that

show and what role minstrel shows served emotionally and psychologically for their audiences and the American public at large. An example of this kind of psychological analysis much later in the historiography would be W. T. Lhamon, Jr.’s 1998 argument that blackface minstrelsy “enacted” a growing anxiety in white urban audiences about miscegenation in growing and diversifying Northern cities (see page 42 in Lhamon, Jr., Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop.)

68 For examples of this kind of writing, see the collection of early twentieth century journalism on minstrelsy in Karl Koenig’s 2002 anthology Jazz In Print (1859-1929), specifically pages 392-397. For more examples of this nostalgic tone of writing about minstrelsy in the first decades of the twentieth century see the introduction to Rice, Edward Le Roy. Monarchs of Minstrelsy, from “Daddy” Rice to Date. New York city, N. Y., Kenny publishing company, 1911. Also see “HEATH DIES YEAR AFTER M’INTYRE” New York Times. August 20, 1938.

Surprisingly, this lament for minstrelsy’s exit from the main stage of American popular culture lasted well through to the songbooks of the 1970s. For an example of this, see this passage from the “Author’s Note” on page “x” of Paskman, Dailey. “Gentlemen, Be Seated!”: A Parade of the American Minstrels. New York, NY: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1976: “This book, then, has been written and compiled for lovers of the art of minstrelsy; for those who love the singing of a good song, and those who have made those songs famous, and for those who enjoy a funny joke, a lively bit of banter, and, above all, for those who delight in sharing the joy of mirth, stories, and melody in the good of happy fellowship. These memorable days are not to be forgotten, but to be relived in the mind, in spirit.”

69 Eric Lott writes on page 17, “blackface minstrelsy’s century-long regulation of black cultural practices stalled the development of African American public arts and generated an enduring narrative of racist ideology, a historical process by which an entire people has been made the bearer of another people’s ‘folk’ culture.” This is perhaps my favorite sentence of Love and Theft.
nineteenth-century black writers and intellectuals, Frederick Douglass foremost among them, had no trouble perceiving the bigotry danced and sung out on the minstrel stage. Douglass wrote that blackface minstrels were “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.”

Douglass’ denunciation is, more or less, the same denunciation that Toll reignited in 1974, and that Alexander Saxton then carried flaming into the 1990s. In the chapter “Blackface Minstrelsy” from his book *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in 19th Century America*, Saxton carefully related what he understood as the racist ideology of blackface to the racist politics of the time. Saxton argued that antebellum minstrelsy was uniquely an expression of the pro-Southern, expansionist, and, most importantly, pro-Slavery politics of the Democratic party of Jacksonian America. It is to this portrait of minstrelsy that Eric Lott made his most important corrective.

The title of Lott’s book, *Love and Theft*, hints that he understands the minstrel show to be an act more psychologically nuanced than wholesale “appropriation” and more politically nuanced than straightforwardly pro-slavery. Although of course Lott acknowledges the superficial racism of minstrelsy’s treatment of the black subject, he argues that “the audiences

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70 This is not to characterize the relationship of the black intellectual to blackface minstrelsy as monolithic--Douglass himself actually believed that for white audience to be confronted with a “colored man in any form” on stage was a benefit to the plight of African Americans (Lott, 37). For the nuance of W. E. B. Du Bois’ understanding of minstrelsy see Lott, 16. For another famous black intellectuals nuanced take on minstrelsy see: Ellison, Ralph. “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke” in *Shadow and Act*, 3rd ed., 45–60. New York, NY: Vintage International, 1995.

71 Lott, 15.

72 Lott makes the comparison in his discussion of Frederick Douglass’ views on the topic of minstrelsy, that these remarks summarize the consensus opinion on the theater practice before his own book in the early 1990s (15).

73 Saxton, 77.

74 Saxton, 74.
involved in...minstrelsy were not universally derisive of African Americans,” that the act of blacking up was “a simultaneous drawing up and crossing of racial boundaries,” and that “the profound white investment in black culture” that was the minstrel tradition “had less certain consequences” than we might assume teleologically from our contemporary understanding of the racist history of the United States. After Lott’s contribution to the historiography, the minstrel stage calls to be seen not as a platform to reinforce anti-black prejudice but as a realm of cultural contest wherein Americans struggled with a racial matrix of “panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure.”

So where have historians gone after Lott? They haven’t gone far. The majority of twenty-first century books on minstrelsy have preoccupied themselves with tracing the minstrel tradition into contemporary cultural forms--“The Dave Chappelle Show” and Spike Lee joints--rather than illuminating new stories from the past to add nuance to the way we currently understand the past (what I understand, in honest, to be the historian’s objective). In one post-Lott essay, W. T. Lhamon, Jr. argues that minstrelsy--a specific tradition in popular entertainment of appropriating, playing, and consuming race--continuously makes its way to the foreground of American popular culture in cycles. First with the craze of antebellum minstrelsy, next with minstrel’s ubiquity in early film, then with the Rock’n’Roll boom and again with the rise of Hip-Hop at the end of the twentieth century, we return to minstrelsy at moments of crisis.

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75 Lott, 15.
76 Lott, 6. What a turn of phrase!
77 Lott, 18.
78 Lott, 6.
79 I’m too brash in this sentiment: for the best books post-Lott see Dale Cockrell’s *Demons of Disorder* and W. T. Lhamon, Jr.’s *Raising Cain*.
80 For the archetype of this kind of cultural history see Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop*. 
Lhamon Jr. argues. But, alas, where does history end and cultural studies begin...? Here, Lhamon, Jr., a preeminent scholar of blackface minstrelsy and the editor of the definitive collections of primary-source minstrel material, ends up sounding like Pete Seeger: both men want to talk about the present when they consider minstrelsy’s past.

I want to historicize minstrelsy, to show a particular past--a certain Georgetown--through my research and writing. Both Toll and Lott liken minstrelsy to fun house mirrors through which scholars can glimpse a distorted image of the minstrel audience’s thoughts and feelings. Yet, thus far, scholars have sought reflections of a national scale. This may be the advantage of a project in local history or more specifically collegiate history: a thorough and particular understanding of the mirror itself--the way that blackface minstrelsy as a practice evolved locally--will allow me to render more clearly the conflicted racial feelings and identities of the audiences who at Georgetown University were young and white and Catholic.

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81 Lhamon, Jr., “‘Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow’: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice.”


83 Lott writes on page 8: “Where representation once unproblematically seemed to image forth its referent, we must now think of, say, the blackface mask as less a repetition of power relations than a signifier for them--a distorted mirror, reflecting displacements and condensations and discontinuities between which and the social field there exist lags, unevennesses, multiple determinations.” Toll writes on page 282: “If [popular culture] is a mirror at all, it is like a funhouse mirror that presents distorted or partial images of the subject.”

84 Lhamon, Jr., Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop. 250.
Chapter 1

Our Lady of Fatima Shines: The Primacy and Proximity of Minstrelsy at Georgetown

On the east end of Copley Lawn, just inside Georgetown University’s front gates, stands a statue of the Virgin Mary. Made of Italian carrara marble, the life-size statue stands at nearly ten feet and shows Mary cloaked, looking down, and pressing her hands together at her breast. Though unusually ornate, the statue is, as you can imagine, a rather conventional one for a Catholic university. In fact, I must have walked right by it each day the past three years--at the heart of campus, it is nearly unavoidable. But I only noticed it for the first time one night recently. Why did I finally notice “Our Lady of Fatima,” as the statue is titled? First off, at night small lights fixed in the lawn shine up at the statue so that its white marble beams against the December sky, so brightly in fact that the sleepy and the impious can’t help but notice as they move on in the dark. Though the glare may have caught my attention, I stopped in front of the statue because I recognized it--I’d just left behind in the university archives a copy of the 1950 Georgetown University Alumni Magazine describing the intense fundraising effort put on that year to purchase this very statue. Obviously, the effort was successful. In fact, the Senior Gift Committee raised more than enough to buy the statue in just one wildly successful event: a blackface minstrel show. That night, knowing its dark history, I saw the statue in a new light.

As the inscription on the marble base of the statue explains, the Georgetown Class of 1950 gifted “Our Lady of Fatima” to the university before graduation that May. It was one expensive gift. Students from the Senior Gift Committee felt it necessary to travel to New York City where “negotiations were completed for a Carrara statue to be carved in Italy.”87 Then, after the first iteration of the statue broke while being loaded onto a ship in its Italian harbor, a second “Lady” was commissioned. All this cost the Senior Gift Committee about $2000.88 Even so, such a high price was no problem for the committee: as the 1950 Alumni Magazine boasted, the fundraising efforts came to more than $3000--nearly seven times tuition in the College of Arts and Sciences that year.89 The Gift Committee raised the money after “a very successful minstrel show which the entire school pitched in to make a great success financially and also entertainment-wise.”90 So successful was the show that the committee, even after re-commissioning the statue, had money enough to plant a dozen trees behind the statue and then some: “It is hoped that in the future,” reported the Alumni Magazine, “with the money still remaining, lights may be set up to shine on Our Lady every night during the school year.”91 As became obvious to me the other night, these wishes were carried out, the lights installed.

89 According to statistical information from 1949-1950 Georgetown University Catalog, courtesy of Lynn Conway, University Archivist, tuition for a single semester in the college was $225 that year. Thus, the
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Standing at the heart of campus, “Our Lady of Fatima” represents the chronological proximity and the historical primacy of blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown. The statue is literally a monument to blackface’s popularity.

Of course, this might not seem a particularly important insight: if minstrelsy was anything, it was popular. In truth, it was the most popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth century United States. Quite often, contemporary historians are at pains to make clear to their readers the “extraordinary popularity” of the minstrel show. This anxious need is not unique to contemporary historians: cultural critics writing even at the moment of the minstrel show’s inception only trusted hyperbole and metaphor to get across their meaning: remember the words of the New York Knickerbocker Magazine in an 1845 opinion piece, “At no time does the atmosphere of our planet cease to vibrate harmoniously to the immortal songs of the [minstrel show].”

For all their heavy-handed emphasis on minstrelsy’s popularity, most historians date the end of the absolute centrality of minstrelsy to American cultural life to the turn of the twentieth century. Yes, American theaters continued to make money off of regular minstrel shows for decades after 1900 but the academy has been more concerned with tracing “the long seeping” of blackface tropes, stereotypes, and techniques into other genres of the American entertainment industry “as the nineteenth century deliquesced into the twentieth” to use W. T. Lhamon, Jr.’s

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95 Many stop their study even earlier. Lott’s touchstone work *Love and Theft* for example only deals with the antebellum period of minstrelsy, the first 30 years of the art form. Dale Cockrell in his book *Demons of Disorder* marks 1843 as the beginning of the era of the “acceptable” minstrel show and, thus in his eyes, the beginning of authentic minstrelsy’s end.
rather pleasing (if rather academic) turn of phrase. People at the beginning of the twentieth century also fretted about the staying power of minstrelsy in their new century. In the 1911 book *Monarchs of Minstrelsy*, a veritable registry of the “luminaries” of the industry, Edmund LeRoy Rice, a theater producer and author who made his name writing books about minstrelsy’s history, begins by asking “Is minstrelsy dying out?” Rice explains the debate in his moment about the future of the form: “How often has the question been asked and how conflicting are the opinions of those who ought to know? Some maintain that minstrelsy is here to stay, while others insist there are no more minstrel shows.” Rice concludes decisively: “But if the question were: Are the minstrels dying out? there could be no divergence in opinion.” Rice answers unequivocally: Yes.

But all this conjecture has little bearing on the documentary record at Georgetown. Twentieth century commentators and 21st century historians alike have made their proclamations about the end of minstrelsy’s popularity; the 1950 Senior Gift Committee knew better. What went on in Spring 1950 on Georgetown’s campus was not the “long seeping” of minstrelsy but the real thing. The plans of the undergraduate chairman of the committee, Ralph Gallagher, and the committee’s faculty moderator, Father Eugene B. Gallagher, S.J., the chairman of all the faculty of religion, to center their year-long fundraising campaign around a springtime minstrel show, defy this academic consensus on how popular minstrel shows should’ve been at the time.

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98 Ibid.

99 The *Ye Domesday Book* makes no mention of any relation between these two men. Father Gallagher continued to serve as Senior Professor of Religion; Ralph Gallagher worked for *LIFE Magazine* after graduation.
Seeing that Gallagher and Gallagher raised fifty percent more than their target amount, those living at Georgetown at the halfway point of the twentieth century seem to have known their own moment and place best. Minstrelsy’s popularity was obvious to these men and not at all strange. Correspondingly, Hoyas reacted to the plans with hearty if not standard school pride: the whole affair was noted in the 1950 yearbook as “perhaps the leading accomplishment of this year’s graduating class.” As is evidenced by the intergenerational collaboration on the planning of the event between Gallagher older and younger, the show can’t be written off as the misbehavior of rowdy seniors or as a final hurrah orchestrated by nostalgic professors. No, that was not how its participants understood it. Instead, the Alumni Magazine celebrated the show as a community affair, reporting to alumni that “the whole school pitched in.” Here, the magazine editors implicate the entire Georgetown community in a crass play on words about the details of the performance: the makeup of the performers would certainly have drawn the common comparison to the blackness of “tar pitch.” And it wasn’t enough to celebrate the show as a financial success alone. The editors emphasize that the show was a success “entertainment-wise also,” making it clear that Hoyas did more than buy tickets for the minstrel show—they relished it.

The university’s magazine highlighted this minstrel show fondly for its readership not because it was an unusual moment but rather because it wasn’t. With pride in their hearts, the editors chose to report on the event because it exemplified to them the best of the life of the

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101 “1950 Class Gift To Georgetown,” 11.
104 Association of the burnt cork and greasepaint of blackface with coal, dirt, and tar were rather common. See Lott, *Love and Theft*, 148.
105 “1950 Class Gift To Georgetown,” 11.
community. Indeed, it represented the community effectively because it was only the most recent instance in the long tradition of minstrelsy at Georgetown.
Chapter 2

Contraband: Minstrelsy and the Civil War at Georgetown

Students and faculty had long understood blackface minstrelsy as more than a regular happening on campus: minstrelsy was essential to their way of life. Thus, writing a commemorative history published in 1889 in honor of Georgetown’s centennial, historian John Gilmary Shea used minstrelsy symbolically as a vital sign for the health of the college. Even at the height of the Civil War, Shea tells us, the tradition of minstrelsy at Georgetown persisted—in fact, it was one of the few traditions that did.

Between 1861 and 1865, life at Georgetown was radically altered—as was life across the nation—by a war between the United States and its traitors, both of whose seats of political power were within Georgetown’s immediate vicinity. So too was the actual fighting. On the 21st of July, 1861, Georgetown students and faculty heard “all day long the roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry,” although they knew not from where. The next day, they put together what it was they had heard as US soldiers straggling back toward Washington reported of the Union’s defeat at Bull Run. Multiple regiments—tens of thousands of fresh Union men—were at different times quartered in the buildings of the College at the command of the US Army before moving on to fight elsewhere. Later, hundreds of the wounded received treatment, healed, or died at Georgetown. After the battle of Antietam, for example, five-hundred wounded soldiers were put

107 Shea, Memorial of the First Century of Georgetown College, 287.
108 Ibid.
109 At least 2,400 men of New York’s 69th and 79th regiment were at different times stationed at Georgetown. See: Shea, 285-286.
up in the dormitories, the study hall, the chapel, the refectory.\textsuperscript{110} “The priests of the house found frequent occasion for the exercise of their ministry,” Shea grimly explains, “with much to console [the soldiers], for many were received, before death, into the Church.”\textsuperscript{111} Often under martial control, with classroom buildings occupied by soldiers--at times waiting, at times dying--undergraduate instruction became more and more difficult.\textsuperscript{112} The student body dwindled. Students had slowly but steadily dropped out over the school year of 1860-1861 until April when hundreds left following the attack on Fort Sumter to go home, North and South, and join their sectional cause.\textsuperscript{113} At that year’s meager commencement ceremony, eleven undergraduates received degrees; the ceremony was over in twenty minutes.\textsuperscript{114}

And yet, despite all this, there were minstrel shows on campus: “With about this number, a sadly shrunken band compared to its array in previous years, Georgetown College was maintained with its regular classes till July, 1862,” Shea reported, “Negro Minstrels lightening the tedium of study and affording diversion.”\textsuperscript{115} As Shea puts it, “the stern and terrible realities of war” did away with the other activities of undergraduate life, even threatening the very existence of the college.\textsuperscript{116} Chronicling the era of existential threat to the institution, Shea finds it necessary to report only two things that continued in the worst years of the war: classes--the activity that constitutes a college--and minstrel shows--the activity that Shea explains sustained the Georgetown community during the war. By framing the persistence of minstrelsy on campus as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 289.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 286.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 284.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 287.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
some surviving modicum of normalcy, Shea implies the centrality of blackface performance to antebellum campus life.

Already an important undergraduate activity before 1861, blackface minstrelsy took on a new importance to students on campus during the Civil War. Firstly, more than only maintaining the facade of what was familiar, Shea also suggests that such performances were uniquely rousing to a distraught and depressed student body. The minstrel show—a theater experience pulsating with comic, derisive energy, characterized by brash, racist irreverence—reinvigorated a campus\textsuperscript{117} caught at the crosshairs of the national crisis. That being said, minstrel shows had been menacingly rousing white audiences since their inception in the 1830s. It was the particular circumstances at Georgetown during the Civil War that imbued the minstrel stage and the blackface mask with a new significance: the stage became the sole arena in which students could openly engage the politics of the Civil War and the mask, the sole instrument by which students could confront the greatest political event of their lifetimes.

In his \textit{Bicentennial History of Georgetown University}--the authoritative Georgetown history,\textsuperscript{118} and a sort of twentieth-century complement to Shea’s 1889 centennial project--Robert Emmett Curran explains that “throughout the [civil] war, the Jesuits at the College, as ordered by

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{117} Georgetown students could look from the Hilltop down to the Potomac where, especially in the last years of the war, steamboats cruised into Washington daily carrying thousands of wounded union men. Bernard Wiget, one Jesuit and professor at Georgetown, recalled “the long lines of ambulances carrying wounded men from the steamboats to the various hospitals,” one of which was set up on Georgetown’s campus. In a letter to a friend in 1864, Wiget wrote: “So many thousands of men wounded! It scarcely can be believed…” His disbelief and wordlessness at the suffering he’d witnessed was representative of the experience of many at Georgetown who, even if they had not fought in the war, had been face to face with its bloody consequences. See: Robert Emmett Curran, \textit{The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889}, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993). 243.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Interestingly enough, although Shea’s history makes multiple reference to the practice of blackface minstrelsy over the first 100 years of the school’s history, Curran’s does not.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
their superiors, kept scrupulously silent about the fratricidal contest.”¹¹⁹ On account of the
predominance of Confederate sympathy amongst Georgetown’s student body, faculty, and
alumni as well as their familial connections to men fighting in the CSA forces,¹²⁰ the Jesuits
decided on a policy of “absolute silence.”¹²¹ They did so for the security of their university—a
university located close to rebellious territory, even closer to the bloodiest battlefields of the war,
and practically in the shadow of the Federal government.¹²² Moreover, the Jesuits worried that
the war would inspire the kind of nativist, anti-Catholic violence that had only recently ceased to
be a constant threat; best to follow a policy of “neutrality,” they figured, to make as few enemies
as possible.¹²³ Thus, college officials tried their hardest to enforce a policy of political neutrality
amongst the student body.¹²⁴

Historians of Georgetown have agreed that the policy worked. Curran audaciously claims
that Jesuits “refrained from political discourse” even as they ministered to the wounded.¹²⁵
Exemplifying this historiographic consensus, Jonathan Marrow, writing on the storied
undergraduate debate club called the Philodemic Society, explains that “whether voluntarily or

¹²⁰ To be clear, Georgetown students and alumni were by no means monolithically for the Confederacy. However, of
the 1,085 Georgetown alumni who were in uniform in the Civil War, 867 served in the Confederate forces while
only 218 served in the Union forces. See: Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From
Academy to University, 1789-1889*, 419.
¹²² Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*, 226. Also,
Jonathan Marrow draws a similar conclusion in his thesis, “‘Let Us Form a Body Guard for Liberty’ –
Conceptions of Liberty and Nation in Georgetown College’s Philodemic Society, 1830 – 1875” (Georgetown
University, 2018), DigitalGeorgetown,
https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1050614/Marrow_HIST409_Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, 66-67.
¹²³ Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*, 226.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 227.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 237.
by preemptive self-censorship” the Society reflected the attitude of the university.\textsuperscript{126} The Society “eschewed political or even semi-political questions during the ongoing conflict’s tenure,” Marrow writes.\textsuperscript{127} They opted for debate questions like “are mental enjoyments greater than physical?”\textsuperscript{128} ignoring the war that was raging a few dozen miles from the college.\textsuperscript{129}

Yet these more recent histories have ignored blackface minstrelsy--despite the fact that Georgetowners at the time understood it to be a vital facet of college life (Shea, writing in 1889, understood it as vital to telling Georgetown’s history). What’s more, these histories have ignored the minstrel show as a site of political discourse; they’ve forgotten how the blackface convention was a tool antebellum Americans used to negotiate the contradictions and conflicts of their culture.\textsuperscript{130}

Of course, there’s no going back to Civil War Georgetown to watch a minstrel show, but we have the next best thing: a playbill, the program that gives an act-by-act run down of just one such show.\textsuperscript{131} We need only investigate its contents to understand that, for these white Georgetown college boys--and of course there were only boys--, wearing blackface was a means of engaging with the politics of the Civil War, a way of speaking on the inescapable conflict of their time--about which their superiors had demanded silence.

At 7 o’clock in the evening on Tuesday, December 17, 1861, one week short of a year since South Carolina declared secession, the first Southern state to leave the union over the issue

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Marrow, “‘Let Us Form a Body Guard for Liberty’ – Conceptions of Liberty and Nation in Georgetown College’s Philodemic Society, 1830 – 1875.” 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 227.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Marrow, 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Lott, 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “First Performance of the ‘Contrabands’ of Georgetown College,” 1861, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives. See Image Appendix, Image 4.1-4.2.
\end{itemize}
of slavery,\textsuperscript{132} it was time for a minstrel show at Georgetown. Though there were only about sixty undergraduates on campus that fall with the majority of their former classmates serving in uniform,\textsuperscript{133} nine students formed a new minstrel troupe. That night was to be its inaugural performance. The new troupe proclaimed their name in large, bold font at the top of the night’s program: “First Performance of the ‘CONTRABANDS’ of Georgetown College,” the program announced.\textsuperscript{134} The name the students chose referenced a controversial practice begun just a few months prior. As Union armies moved South, thousands of African Americans took matters of freedom into their own hands. They fled bondage to US army camps where some sympathetic US Army officers declared them “contraband of war” rather than return them to their white owners, as US law still stipulated.\textsuperscript{135} Bucking the typical language of minstrel troupe names--forgoing words and pejoratives like ‘Minstrels,’ ‘Serenaders,’ ‘Ethiopians’ or ‘Darkies’ that had an established association with the genre--the students chose to call themselves “the Contrabands,” an extremely topical reference and a deliberate signal of their political awareness.

Implying that their characters were black slaves escaped to and now in the custody of Georgetown,\textsuperscript{136} the name ironized both the unspoken Confederate sympathy of the majority of

\textsuperscript{133}Shea, 287.
\textsuperscript{134}Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “First Performance of the ‘Contrabands’ of Georgetown College.” See Image Appendix, Image 3.
\textsuperscript{135}For basic overview see: American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, “Background Essay on Civil War ‘Contraband,’” HERB: Social History for Every Classroom, 2008, https://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/529. For the groundbreaking research that led to the Union’s contraband policy and the existence of contraband camps entering general historical knowledge see the work of one of Georgetown’s very own and very best: Chandra Manning, “Working for Citizenship in Civil War Contraband Camps,” Journal of the Civil War Era 4, no. 2 (2014): 172–204.
\textsuperscript{136}Of course, Georgetown was founded and managed by the slaveowning Jesuits of Maryland; it was materially sustained by their wholehearted participation in the institution of slavery. The Jesuits of Maryland liquidated their
the community as well as the fact that the campus had been converted into a de facto Union
camp on multiple occasions. Alluding to (and belittling) the plight of fugitive blacks in Union
camps, the students insinuated that they too were living in a condition of only partial freedom,
living on a campus where they could only communicate their political beliefs through just this
sort of innuendo. Tragically, the students’ name choice makes clear exactly what they
understood to be at the heart of the sectional conflict: the institution of slavery and the challenge
to it from those enslaved, wanting to be free.

The show was political not only in name but in its content. That is, what the nine student
minstrels performed on stage had overt political meaning.

The most explicit example of political commentary on the Civil War came in the second
act (called “Part II”) when the student minstrels delivered a series of satirical stump speeches.
Regardless of any university policy of “political neutrality,” such a speech would have
surprised no one; in fact, the audience would have expected it at that point in the show.

By the 1860s, the format of the minstrel show was more or less standardized into a
tripartite affair. In the first act, minstrels sang, played, and danced an assortment of random

holding in human property in 1838 when they sold 272 black women, men, and children to Catholic slaveholders in
Louisiana in order to pay off massive debts. This show was put up 23 years later at a college whose financial
viability was the direct result of that sale. For more of the work being written on this topic see: Georgetown
University, “Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation,” Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation, accessed December 13,

Of course, the students’ conclusion that the most effective way to play out their political ideas about the war was
by “blacking-up” and assuming a racist dialect signals again that on some level they understood the Civil War to be
a conflict inspired by issues of race and racism.

See “Part II” in Image Appendix, Image 4.2, Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “First Performance of
the ‘Contrabands’ of Georgetown College.”

Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 226.
songs and dances, interrupting themselves every so often with jokes, puns, and comic banter in racist, stereotypic dialect—supposed examples of black wit. In the second act, often called the “olio,” minstrels offered a variety show of short acts and gags that could include any number of comic dialogues, cross-dressing performances, burlesque sketches, or acrobatics, but that always centered on the olio’s characteristic feature: the satirical stump speech. In the third and final act, minstrels presented a longer-form narrative skit, usually set in the (mythic) South.

Exuberant and illogical, brimming with wordplay and delivered in the same stereotypic black dialect that the minstrel show codified and gave over to the racist world, the so-called stump speech was a satirical lecture on a topical subject, be it scientific, historical, or political. The stump speech drew its laughs first by mocking the intelligence of its orator—a fumbling black caricature pretending at seriousness and logic but undermined by his clownish physical comedy and speech riddled with malapropisms, obscene puns, non sequiturs, and nonsense talk. However, as preeminent scholar of minstrelsy Robert C. Toll writes, minstrel stump speakers also “used their ludicrous verbosity to express serious social criticism….” So, the stump speech got its laughs both from the minstrel’s racist foolishness as well as his send-up of topical debate and the ways that serious orators spoke about them.

141 See Lott, 5, 140 for the structure of the minstrel show as well as for an explanation of the origins of the “olio” and how the show came to be standardized in a three-part structure from its origins as entr’acte entertainment. The standardization of the three part format is often attributed to Dan Emmett’s Virginia Minstrels, see Lott 140 and page 51 in Robert C. Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
143 Lott, 140.
144 Toll, 52.
145 Ibid., 56.
The Contrabands’ stump speech that night was a circulating, stock address titled “Dat’s What’d De Matter.”\(^{146}\) Given minstrelsy’s embrace of improvisation, its exact content was subject to change each performance but scripts of the same speech given other places reveal the fundamentals of what the student--F. H. Gerdes, a white undergraduate wearing blackface--‘lectured’ on that evening.\(^{147}\) Its title ironically understated in racist dialect what was most obviously the matter in the nation: the brutality of Civil War. “Why dem fellers is goin’ to make any quantity of countries out ob dese United States,” one section of the speech went, “dem’s de fellers dat tinks E Plurbius Unum sounds vulgar, so dey’re goin’ to changer it to E Unibus Plurium. Dat’s what’s de matter…”\(^{148}\) Beneath the mask of greasepaint and the layer of nonsensical and parodied language, the anxiety of a young white man emerges in these lines. He worries about the dissolution of the Union and, sighing hopelessly at the anonymous decision makers he refers to only as “dem fellers,” feels powerless as history unfolds around him. The stump speech built in comedy but also in mock rhetoric, eventually arriving at undisguised political stances. One account of this stock speech finishes with a punning but gruesome pro-Unionist climax: “But, feller citizens, if you don’t want the fraternal viscera ob yer animal system riddled like a sieve, by de worms ob remorse, preserve de Union!...If you don’t want de American Eagle plucked bare as a New Year’s turkey, preserve de Union!”\(^{149}\) Another script of

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\(^{146}\) Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “First Performance of the ‘Contrabands’ of Georgetown College.”


\(^{149}\) Nickels, Civil War Humor. 123.
this speech calls for the minstrel to reprimand the president of the Confederacy as follows: “Jeff Davis...you should never let yourself on treason sup,” before urging General U. S. Grant to “[catch] ole King Cotton by de slack part ob his trouserloons, an’ shakes de debil out ob him!” an exclamation that betrays an understanding of the Civil War as rooted in the tensions of the devilish slave economy.

The speech was at its heart about the love of and fear for the Union--a surprising message given the pro-Southern sentiments that quietly coursed through the Georgetown community. Gerdes skated over multiple nuanced views in contemporary politics from hints of anti-war pro-Unionism (“Preserve de Union!”--the line of so-called peace Democrats or Copperheads) to more aggressive rhetoric of anti-slavery. I will not explore the array of conflicting politics that Georgetown community members practiced during the Civil War; rather, I want to demonstrate that the most obvious place where students played out their politics was on the minstrel stage, that they could and did voice their opinions most freely in racist “darky dialect.”

Not only the second act stump speech but the entire rest of that night’s minstrel show--and all those like it put on during the war years--must have been interpreted to be speaking about the war. The immediate context of the show--the troupe’s referential name, the blatant politics of the stump speech, the seeming blackness the student minstrels fabricated for themselves--leaves little room for interpretation. Furthermore, given the large-scale context--the warring world in which the performers and audience members lived--each with classmates, fathers, brothers, and uncles fighting and dying--it is by no means a great critical stretch to read every moment of the show as a political statement.

150 Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s*. 60.
Not every song the Contrabands performed that evening was as openly political or
downright vulgar as their fifth song, a Stephen Foster tune titled “‘Way Down Souf.’”151 In the
middle of the first act, the student H. C. Williamson performed this song that not only supported
the Southern cause but declared the fictional slave’s own wish to escape to Cuba to preserve, if
not the Confederacy, at least his beloved institution of slavery:

We’ll put for de souf Ah! dat’s the place
For the steeple chase and de bully hoss race…
No use talkin when de Nigga wants to go,
Whar de corntop blossom and de canebrake grow;
Den come along to Cuba, and we’ll dance de polka juba,
Way down souf, whar de corn grow.152

Even the students’ least outrageous choices demonstrate their unwillingness to pass up
any opportunity to comment on the war. For example, the seemingly innocuous

“Fare-Thee-Well, Kitty Dear,”153 which opened the show, laments the death of a Southern belle:

I saw the smile of evening die
In beauty, on a Southern sky
And as I marked that fairy scene,
So mild, so lovely and serene
A strange wild sound, yet sweet and clear,
In tones like these, I chanced to hear
Fare thee well, Kitty Dear
Thou art sleeping in the grave so low
Never more, Kitty Dear
Wilt thou listen to my old banjo.154

on American music: Matthew Shaftel, “Singing a New Song: Stephen Foster and the New American Minstrelsy,”
Music and Politics 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007), http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0001.203.
Though on its face a sentimental love ballad, the song laments the death of the speaker’s lover as a stand-in for the death of a way of life in the South. The speaker mourns for the South’s beauty, serenity, and loveliness as well for the culture of slavery, here represented by the banjo. All these elements of the Old South mythology are—due to an intrusion of Northern violence suggested by “[A] strange, wild sound”—fated to be “never more.” And which student sang this opening number full of sappy, romantic regret for the South? F. H. Gerdes, the same student who returned to the stage within the hour to deliver the aforementioned pro-Union stump speech in the second act.¹⁵⁵

That the same student would at the beginning of the night long for Southern slave society and then, in his very next appearance on stage, exhort General Grant to root out the devil of slavery¹⁵⁶ does not diminish the meaningfulness of the minstrel show; on the contrary, the fact only demonstrates the special function with which Georgetown students endowed the minstrel show during the Civil War. The utter ambivalence that F. H. Gerdes embodied that night was only one instance of how these conflicted white students—both the performers and the audience—seized on the opportunity the minstrel show provided to try on different political leanings. One might assume these college boys would have worked out these kinds of serious political questions—their positions on union, secession, and regional loyalty, on slavery and freedom—in a high-minded academic manner. But they didn’t—or rather, on order of Georgetown officials, they couldn’t. So, students—all kinds of them, those hailing from New York, the jewel

¹⁵⁶ “[Catch] ole King Cotton by de slack part ob his trouserloons, an’ shakes de debil out ob him!” from Meer, 60.
of the Union, to those from the seat of slave power in Louisiana—turned to minstrelsy. They invested new importance into an already established tradition in campus life, as people tend to do in times of crisis. Indeed, while Philodemicians remained silent, student minstrels donned the blackface mask to openly (and finally) negotiate the major event of American life.

That students would slyly rebel against official university policy by putting on a show rings true to the enduring dynamics of campus life, a unique site in American life for intergenerational collaboration and conflict. Indeed, cultural theorist W. T. Lhamon Jr., drew a similar comparison, writing that “youths were of course no more accepting of social control” at the time of minstrelsy’s ascendency as they were at the end of the twentieth century, when he was writing. Lhamon, Jr. says minstrelsy—with its young male performers, young male audiences, and general unruliness—was the first iteration of an American youth culture characterized by the desire to resist social control, an idea we still recognize today. He makes minstrelsy out to be a sort of proto-Rock ‘n’ Roll, where white youths “[flaunted] their

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157 The documentary record indicates that the home states of Georgetown students had no bearing on whether or not they performed in minstrel shows. Of the Contrabands, James P. McElroy was from New York, Henry Major was from Georgetown’s immediate vicinity in Washington, D.C., and Hugh C. Williamson was one of the many Georgetown students who came up to study from his home in Louisiana. To find information on these student-minstrels’ home states, see Shea, 291, 601, and 296 respectively.


159 Lhamon, Jr. argues that white working class youths identified with blackness as “representations of all that YMCAs and evangelical organizers”—examples of what Lhamon, Jr. sees as emerging bourgeoisie mechanisms of social control over the new droves of immigrant, poor youths in industrializing American cities after the breakdown of the apprentice system—“were working to suppress.” “As now,” Lhamon, Jr. writes, “youths worried then about how to represent their overwhelming social forces to themselves. The minstrel show was their form countering the channeling [merchant-capitalists] imposed.” See Lhamon, Jr. “Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice,” 277-278.

160 Particularly ironic because rock’n’roll music will evolve out of the music and tropes of the minstrel show; Lhamon, Jr. argues that rock’n’roll music in the 1950s repeated the racial strategies of blackface minstrelsy to find success in American popular culture. See: Lhamon, Jr. “Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice,” 281.
affection for these signs of a kimbo insurrection against the conventions of control.” He means that the blackface makeup, the overwrought dialect, the banjo music, the lurid dancing, and the obscene humor were ways to stick it to the powers that be. When he says this, Lhamon, Jr. is actually talking about a specific youth culture separate from Georgetown: that of white working class, immigrant youths in industrializing Northern cities, the population every scholar of minstrelsy focuses on. Nonetheless, his logic holds at Georgetown during the war years when the minstrel show served as a subtle means by which students defied the gag rule of their professors and priests.

The difference--beyond the class distinctions--between Lhamon, Jr.’s subject and the Georgetown community was that, on the Hilltop, the minstrels and the authorities shared the same concerns. Though it is true that the undergraduates--not the older Jesuits--would have been most concerned with the possibility of serving (and dying) in the trenches, the Jesuits imposed their social control in efforts to protect the institution to which they all belonged, even if unequally, and about which they all really did care. Moreover, all shared the fear of anti-Catholic violence, a particularly communal anxiety. That the Georgetown community would continue to put on minstrel shows--and with renewed vigor at that--during this period of anxiety

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161 Ibid., 278.
164 Shea, 287.
corresponds with one function of the minstrel show: the minstrel act as an articulation of white American identity, a reaffirmation of whiteness up against a contrived blackness.\footnote{Lott does work to show how the minstrel show was an affirmation of “white male superiority,” a way to “shore up” white identity. However, he is always speaking about a particular working-class, urban whiteness that does not align with the identity of the students at Georgetown. See Lott, 70-71, 137.}

Since its beginning, minstrelsy linked to the nineteenth century history of anti-Catholic violence in the eastern US—the history which I posit here preoccupied the Georgetown community at the outset of the Civil War. The ties extend as far back as at least 1834 to the Boston suburb of Charlestown, Massachusetts on a night in which a nativist mob burned down a convent.\footnote{Dale Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World} (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 73.} Mob members wore blackface and dressed in the exaggerated raggedy costumes of early minstrelsy. Once the convent began burning, the mob implored its ringleaders—who the \textit{Boston Post} described as “midnight leaders of misrule,”\footnote{Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder}, 185.} punning on the time of the crime and the blackened faces of its perpetrators—to sing the most famous and popular minstrel song “Jump Jim Crow.” John Buzzell, the mob’s leader, excused himself from singing, explaining that he had a cold. The use of blackface conventions and music was not limited to anti-Catholic violence; a similar riot occurred in Ontario in 1837 in which the victim was a politically controversial printer whom the mob falsely believed to be Jewish.\footnote{Cockrell, 74.} Given the pre-existing connection between the nativist violence Georgetowners feared and blackface minstrelsy, the students may well have put on blackface minstrel shows to publicly disavow part of their Catholic identity. Blackface minstrelsy in this case served as a ritual in “Americanization,” as scholar Robert Cantwell terms it, a ritual by which Catholic-Americans could distance themselves from the black people they
mocked and thus align themselves with white Protestants. It is possible that students “blacked-up” to reaffirm their whiteness over and above their Catholicism, to demonstrate their belonging in America, to protect the Georgetown community against nativist violence.

This understanding of blackface as racial bulwark emphasizes the communal character of minstrelsy at Georgetown. Even when the Contrabands subverted university policy that particular night in December 1861—providing an important if covert political outlet for the student body—they still performed as “the Contrabands of Georgetown College.” That is to say, their performance was within the fold of what was acceptable and even encouraged at Georgetown.

Thus, this official and acceptable practice was important enough to continue through the period of greatest trial to the survival of the institution. In spite—or perhaps because of—its acceptable status, minstrel shows represented during the Civil War a special opportunity for Georgetown students to confront the greatest political event of their century while quelling anxieties about their belonging in the nation being torn asunder.

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Chapter 3

Home Again: How Minstrelsy Welcomed Young Men Into Their New World

Nineteenth century historian of Georgetown John Gilmary Shea, author of Georgetown’s centennial history, celebrates the persistence of minstrel shows as a uniquely good thing during the war years because he understands it as typical of healthy campus life. And he assumes that his readers in 1889 will as well: that’s why he uses minstrelsy to measure the well-being of the university both during and after the war.

“When Georgetown College, after the summer vacation of 1865, was ready once more to resume the training of the young, [President of Georgetown] Father Early was cheered by the sight of such numbers of pupils as had not been seen for the last four years,” writes Shea of the first school year after the war’s end. “The old College had passed successfully through its greatest period of trial. September showed more than a hundred boarders and a number of day scholars… The old life revived. The Officer’s Feasts were again enjoyed with zest. The Contrabands gave a concert after the negro minstrel type, and a baseball club was formed…[the college’s] worst days were past…it would regain and exceed the highest point that it had yet reached.” To prove to his readers that “the old life” had in fact been “revived,” Shea believes that the Contrabands’ performance--referring to them by their official name no less--is as

\[170\] Shea, 287.

\[171\] Father John Early, S.J. served as president of the university from 1858 through 1865 when Bernard A. Maguire became president. Early then served as president for another three years from 1870 to 1873 before Patrick F. Healy, S.J. took over. See: Curran, 404.

\[172\] Shea, 293.

\[173\] Ibid.
compelling a piece of evidence as the reinstitution of seasonal traditions, the organization of collegiate athletics, or even the surging numbers of students enrolled.

This understanding of minstrel shows as indicative of the health of the community endured from Shea’s time on into the twentieth century: thus, the editors of the 1950 *Alumni Magazine* chose to report on the minstrel show fundraiser, communicating to their alumni community that all was right on the hilltop.

In 1889 and also in 1950, these writers highlighted minstrelsy to their Georgetown readership because it was a shared experience amongst community-members. As a literary example, the minstrel show was a clever choice because it was sure to resonate with the majority of alumni and across generations of students. These writers could be confident that their readers would relate to what they were saying not just because minstrel shows were popular but because blackface performance was part of official university-wide functions that most Hoyas would have participated in.

This chapter will use another blackface performance in 1922 to investigate more reasons as to why young men at Georgetown attended and put on minstrel shows so often, why they found such meaning in blackface performance. We have seen how the minstrel stage provided a crucial space for political discourse; investigating its other cultural functions on campus elucidates why Georgetown community members across generations cared about minstrelsy.

Throughout a Hoya’s experience--from his arrival on campus on into his relationship to the university as an alumnus--the university connected to him via blackface performance. Just as university publications reported stories of blackface performance to alumni after they had moved on from the Hilltop, the university welcomed its new students to campus by the same means.
One such moment occurred on Sunday evening, October 1, 1922. New and returning students attended the official “Welcome Back Banquet” held in Ryan Refectory. The banquet introduced students to the most important features of extracurricular life-- accordingly, it included a blackface performance.\(^ {174}\)

That evening at the beginning of the 1922 school year, “Ryan Hall was decked in its usual festive decorations,” reported *The Hoya*,\(^ {175}\) the two-year-old student newspaper,\(^ {176}\) in its first issue of that Fall semester. At the banquet, the new students enjoyed “a fine meal.”\(^ {177}\) The student council president (more precisely known as the President of the Yard)\(^ {178}\) and the captains of each of the college’s athletic teams gave a toast. As the paper described it, each captain gave “a word of praise for [the] ‘Hoyas.’”\(^ {179}\) After eating, the College Orchestra played a short concert, making “a wonderful impression” on the fresh Hoyas.\(^ {180}\) Then the live performance section of the banquet concluded when a student delivered a blackface monologue. *The Hoya* reported that the blackface monologue “pleased everyone.”\(^ {181}\)

The event organizers slotted the blackface performance as the finale of the live entertainment portion of the banquet. Its position at the evening’s climax indicates how excited


\(^{175}\) *The Hoya* has been Georgetown’s primary student newspaper since 1920. For a brief history see: “About Us,” accessed February 23, 2019, [https://www.thehoya.com/about-us/](https://www.thehoya.com/about-us/).

\(^{176}\) “Welcome Back Banquet in Ryan Refectory,” October 5, 1922.


\(^{178}\) Mass meetings occurred throughout the 1870s amongst members of the student body seeking to democratically regulate the new political and athletic clubs that students founded more and more of during the presidency of Patrick Healy, who encouraged extracurricular life like no Georgetown president before him. By the end of the decade, students had organized the practice into an official student government known as “the yard.” See Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*, 304.

\(^{179}\) Ibid.

\(^{180}\) Ibid.

\(^{181}\) Ibid.
the organizers were about its inclusion in the event, how certain they were that it belonged in the evening’s program, how they anticipated that it would please the crowd. Indeed it did: “[The evening’s] entertainment...ranked among one of the best Georgetown has ever enjoyed,” declared the Hoya.182

The rest of the evening’s program--what preceded and followed the blackface performance--tells us about what the event meant to its organizers and what it was supposed to mean to its attendees. Observing the tone of the special evening as a whole reveals that the event's organizers suggested to new students that blackface performance represented the best of college life. “The Welcome Back Banquet” offered a warm welcome back to the community, officially inaugurating another school year and exhibiting what student leaders considered most important within the community that year. Fundamentally, the banquet celebrated Georgetown. The toasts from student body leaders, the wishes for athletic success, the swelling music from the College Orchestra--this was an evening of school pride.

That evening, the event organizers communicated to freshmen what it was to be a member of the Georgetown community. The student-facilitated program complimented and elaborated the message delivered by College President J. B. Creeden earlier that fall in his inaugural address to students.183 From their perspective as returning students, the organizers and performers made specific President Creeden’s call for freshmen to remember “the necessity for the participation in extra-class activities together with the regular schoolroom work” as well as to “retain good will toward the university, and uphold the standard of Georgetown.”184

182 Ibid.
184 “President Inaugurates School Year with Address, Prizes Awarded” October 5, 1922.
banquet, new students learned which of those extra-class activities were held in the highest regard. From the respect given to the leaders of specific activities, new students would understand that these student council leaders, athletes, musicians, and blackface performers were the young men who upheld the standard of Georgetown, the young men whose example President Creeden urged new students to follow.

After the blackface monologue concluded the live performance section of the evening, the banquet moved outside into the quad. The night culminated with an outdoor screening of short movies of Georgetown triumphs. In the evening air of the quad, students cheered and smiled at footage of the Georgetown football team trouncing the University of North Carolina 28-0 two seasons earlier, footage of commencement week the spring prior, and finally footage of the unveiling of the John Carroll statue in 1912. The Hoya remarked that the whole night was “a hit.”

An op-ed in the same issue of The Hoya made explicit the implicit messages of the banquet. “Not until we have heard the crash of the bell for attention in Ryan Refectory, not until the historic old hall rings with the stentorian voice of the President of the Yard calling for three lusty ‘Hoyas’ and not until the stirring tones of Alma Mater reverberate in the Potomac lined cluster, do we feel that we’re at Georgetown again,” wrote the editorial board. The editorial board suggests that to return to Georgetown, to truly be at Georgetown again was more than a matter of students’ physical reality. It was also a question of emotional condition: not until this

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185 “Welcome Back Banquet in Ryan Refectory,” October 5, 1922.
186 Ibid.
ceremony and its school traditions made students “feel” a certain way had they returned to Georgetown.

“Sunday night,” the editorial board continued about the evening banquet, “we experienced this feeling, and thrilling at the ‘welcome’ felt the blood tingling in our veins with the warmth of the reception. For the newcomer it was a revelation, an awakening.” In this passage, to describe the experience of returning to Georgetown, the editorial board spares no literary strategy. To say that returning to Georgetown was an emotional experience, they emphasize the collective “feeling.” To say that returning to Georgetown was a physiological experience, they employ the language of the body: “[we] felt the blood tingling in our veins,” they write. To say that returning to Georgetown is a spiritual experience, they turn to religious language: they call the arrival on campus “a revelation, an awakening.” This multifold description is overwhelming; it is almost too much to believe. The editorial board was at pains to convey the way that Georgetown was more than just their college but their home--a place to which their hearts, bodies, and spirits were connected. The editorial board explained the moment for the freshmen class: “The cheery atmosphere of good feeling that prevails opens the gateway to Georgetown to the newcomer. It's the thrill he had been looking for; new worlds are open to him and old ones closed. He has entered Georgetown.” Then they addressed returning students such as themselves, “To the old man,” they concluded, “it is home again.”

It is easy to see how most aspects of the banquet ignited such intense feelings. Footage of athletic victories and symbolic moments in Georgetown history inspired school pride; student

188 “Welcome Back,” The Hoya, October 5, 1922.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid.
leaders’ best wishes for the coming school year excited the audience for what lay before them; and an outdoor orchestral concert on an early autumn evening would stir something in most people still today. But where did blackface performance fit in? How did it have to do with the students’ return to Georgetown and the search for the feeling of home?

Blackface minstrel shows appealed directly to people yearning for a sense of home. Many of the songs and skits of the minstrel tradition directly expressed longing for an imagined home. Historians have documented how the blackface minstrel show introduced a novel exuberance and raucousness to the American stage but simultaneously a new height of sentimental and romantic material.\(^{192}\)

Alexander Saxton posits that these sentimental and nostalgic themes spoke to the desires and circumstances of the working-class subjects of blackface minstrelsy’s traditional historiography.\(^{193}\) As the historian Rhae Lynn Barnes explains, at the mid-point of the 19th century—the zenith of minstrelsy’s popularity—millions of Americans found themselves separated from their families or displaced from their original homes.\(^{194}\) Because of their displacement, these people found minstrelsy all the more relatable and, thus, minstrelsy grew in popularity; in turn, their displacement shaped and reinforced minstrelsy’s sentimental themes.\(^{195}\) Saxton writes about these displaced white Americans: he cites soldiers on the move, their families torn apart during and after the Civil War; restless migrants venturing out to the western frontier; new immigrant populations recently arrived in a new land; and people from the rural

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192 Toll, 36
193 Saxton, 75.
194 Ayers et al. 2019
195 Ibid.
eastern US moving to rapidly industrializing Northern cities and experiencing urban *anomie* for the first time.\(^{196}\)

Minstrels often portrayed African American caricatures who, having been sold away from their plantation or having moved into freedom in the North, struggled with displacement and longed to return to South.\(^{197}\) In this way, fictional black Americans on the minstrel stage voiced the real concerns of white Americans in the audience.\(^{198}\)

Of course, the South for which minstrel characters longed did not resemble the US South as we understand it from a critical historical lenses. Instead, minstrel literature and performance crafted “a mythology of the South as a region fascinatingly different, closely wedded to nature, and, above all, *timeless.*”\(^{199}\) Minstrelsy presented an ahistorical South to the displaced white Americans who’d left the rural East for growing cities or the frontier. Saxton explains that “the South”--or rather, the ahistorical myth of the South-- “became symbolically their old home: the place where simplicity, happiness, all the things we have left behind, exist outside of time.”\(^{200}\) Underneath a black mask, minstrels spoke to these white people’s actual experiences of loss and longing.

The minstrel’s ahistorical fantasy of the South suggests an upsetting truth that shouldn’t be forgotten discussing his romanticism and sentimentalism: Whether in a tavern in a frontier town or in Ryan Refectory on Georgetown’s campus, the blackface minstrel may have mused tenderly on loss but he always delivered these messages as one of a stock of racist characters. The sentimentalism arrived in songs, jokes, and stories that depended on racist assumptions for

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\(^{196}\) Saxton, 75 and Lott, 190.

\(^{197}\) Ayers et al. 2019

\(^{198}\) Ibid.

\(^{199}\) Saxton, 75.

\(^{200}\) Ibid.
their humor and pathos. Most heinously, these nostalgic materials implied racist political conclusions: they romanticized the system of slavery and life slave society.\textsuperscript{201} The “place” to which the blackface characters longed to return was the mythologized old plantation.\textsuperscript{202} Thus, these sentimental materials implied the deepest insult of the blackface convention: that African American characters themselves enjoyed life in bondage and wished to be re-enslaved.

Even so, the politics of sentimental minstrelsy were not black and white. Songs that at once depended on “stereotyped black emotionality” for their pathos sometimes turned that pathos toward an anti-slavery critique: this includes a whole category of songs in which a slave character mourned being separated from his family by the slave trade.\textsuperscript{203}

Even as the racist songs and skits denigrated African Americans, within them also burned motifs like homesickness and nostalgia. These emotions, along with messages of white supremacy, contributed to the show’s emotional power simultaneously. During minstrelsy’s long reign over American popular culture, these nostalgic themes drew audiences to the minstrel stage almost as strongly as the racist mood in which they were communicated. As Lott writes, “audiences everywhere fell for” minstrelsy’s sentimentalism.\textsuperscript{204}

Georgetown boys, it seems, fell too. Organizers included blackface performance in campus events like the “Welcome Back Banquet” in part because of how minstrelsy spoke to homesickness, which was a common mood at the onset of the school year. Thus, Georgetown students performed and enjoyed minstrelsy in a remarkably similar emotional situation to the

\textsuperscript{201} Toll, 88.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}. 33, 187.
\textsuperscript{204} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}. 190.
working-class subjects of Saxton’s and Barnes’ historical studies: all of these people were people who missed their original homes and were trying to make new ones.

Robert Pace, historian of nineteenth century collegiate life, writes about the deep homesickness of students similar to those at Georgetown. The students’ new homes weren’t physically welcoming, especially considering how most students had exchanged the houses they’d know their whole lives as American elites for residences that could at best be described as spartan. In an alumni reminiscence published in the *Georgetown College Journal* in 1906, Georgetown alumnus James Rydell Randall told a story in which this brutal physical transition brought on a bout of extreme homesickness. “We slept in a cold dormitory, in winter, and had to rise at 5:15 in the morning,” Randall recalled of his days at Georgetown. “If we did not get down to the subterranean wash-room where often the ice had to be broken to get water for ablution, we were barred out and were obliged to wash at the pump, on the campus, which still remains. Often I have, in sleet and snow, with wet shoes and shivering frame, performed that task while bitter tears streamed down and froze upon my cheeks, and I thought of my mother and my home, wondering why such affectionate parents as mine were had condemned their little boy

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206 Before rolling your eyes at the “discomforts” of the privileged, white boys who attended the nation’s most elite Catholic university, consider this fact of life at Georgetown in the nineteenth century: faculty often punished students found in violation of important rules with confinement to a small room in the tower of the Old North Building on campus. Confined students were kept on a diet of bread and water. The detention room was known commonly as the “jug”—a student given to breaking the rules who spent a good deal of his time in detention was known as a “jug rat.” See: “What Was A Jug Rat?,” Georgetown University Library, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.library.georgetown.edu/infrequently-asked-questions/what-was-jug-rat.

207 Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South*. 37.


to such torture.”210 Randall’s new material surroundings at Georgetown led him to weep and long for his home and his family. Randall cries for his “home,” and specifically for his mother. His nostalgia is not just for place but for people he left behind.

Not only had what surrounded these young men changed but also who surrounded them. Many of the students were away from their families for the first time in their lives.211 For the first hundred years of Georgetown’s history, students almost never left campus during the term, and, if one did win permission to leave, it required a faculty escort.212 Many stayed the summer at Georgetown as well and under the same rules.213 The college scarcely granted home visits, even to those students who boarded at Georgetown from its immediate vicinity.214 When we understand the intensity of the change that arrival at college represented in students’ lives and the intensity of the emotions that change spurred, the words of the Hoya’s editorial board seem not hyperbolic but spot-on: “[For] the newcomer...new worlds are open to him and old ones closed. He has entered Georgetown.”215

Blackface minstrelsy’s sentimentality addressed the nostalgia students felt for their lost worlds, an emotion students linked specifically to the time of year of the Welcome Banquet. An alumni letter published in the Georgetown College Journal from 1912 connected feelings of homesickness specifically to the annual ceremony of the Welcome Banquet.216 Alumnus J. Percy Keating, a founder of the Georgetown College Journal writing in for the publication’s fortieth

212 Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 176.
213 Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 177.
214 Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 176.
215 Ibid.
anniversary, recalled how when “poor little homesick me” arrived on campus in the 1870s, he was not greeted with “three Hoyas,”--the cheer given at later banquets like the one in 1922--but instead with “hurrahs,” as the “Hoya Saxa” school chant didn’t begin until the 1890s. In his retrospective letter, Keating acknowledges the homesickness he and generations of Hoyas felt--an emotion powerful enough to be remembered forty years on. And Keating links that homesickness specifically to the traditions of the beginning of the year, like the Welcome Banquet. All the more reason students would include blackface performance in those traditions.

Sources don’t make clear which blackface monologue or song the student minstrel performed at the 1922 Welcome Banquet; thus, it is unclear how sentimental the performance was relative to all minstrel music. But given that particular moment’s homesick mood and the prevalence of nostalgia in all minstrel material, it seems likely that sentimentality was high.

Students recognized the prevalence of sentimentality in minstrelsy on campus. In fact, this sentimental blackface performance was so regular that it became a bit of a campus cliche. A satirical piece in the *Hoya* in 1928 encouraged students to cultivate the “gentle art of boo-ing” when confronted with cliches of campus performance. The article called out as a campus cliche, “All singers, either black-face or otherwise, who desire to go back to their mammy,

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218 The op-ed on the meaning of the Welcome Banquet describes the President of the Yard “calling for three lusty ‘Hoyas’” as the climax of the toasting portion of the banquet’s festivities. See: “Welcome Back,” *The Hoya,* October 5, 1922.
219 ‘Hoya Saxa,’ Georgetown’s cheer, was “first acknowledged in print in the *Georgetown College Journal* in 1891 following a football victory and appears regularly as part of the college yells that were printed and distributed at football games.” For a deeper history of the chant that inspires the name of the school mascot and the later student paper see: “Fact or Fiction? Mythbusting Hoya History with the University Archives | Georgetown University Library,” Georgetown University Library, April 23, 2016, [https://www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/fact-or-fiction-mythbusting-hoya-history-university-archives](https://www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/fact-or-fiction-mythbusting-hoya-history-university-archives).
sweetheart, or any other person, in Alabama, Dixie, Georgia, Kentucky, or any of the rest of the forty-eight states, or colonial possessions.\textsuperscript{221} The hyperbole of the joke reveals a real frustration on the \textit{Hoya’s} part with just how regularly students performed nostalgic blackface songs on campus.

Indeed, the documentary record bears out their frustration and the sheer frequency of such performance. The frequency proves Georgetown students’ fondness for the most sentimental of minstrel songs. Student performers chose to perform the most famous sentimental tunes--over and over again. For example, at a campus concert featuring student groups and a professional mandolinist in January 1902, students enjoyed the Stephen Foster minstrel song “Old Folks at Home.”\textsuperscript{222} Then, at another concert with an otherwise entirely different program only one month later in February 1902, students performed the same song again.\textsuperscript{223} The Georgetown community wasn’t bored by the repeat performance; to the contrary, the \textit{Georgetown College Journal} had difficulty “find[ing] words of sufficient praise” for the two events.\textsuperscript{224}

The obvious student enthusiasm for this song, whose lyrics ooze with nostalgia, tells us that it resonated with the student body. Singing in pejorative dialect, the song’s narrator yearns to reunite with his family and his master. The first verse begins:

\begin{verbatim}
Way down upond de Swanee ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,
Dere's wha de old folks stay.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{221} The article also called out for ridicule, “All acrobats who make a great deal of noise doing simple stunts.” See: “Trivialities.” 3.
\textsuperscript{224} “The Glee Banjo And Mandolin Concert,” 250.
All up and down de whole creation,
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for de old plantation,
And for de old folks at home.²²⁵

The narrator longs to return to a romantic, riverside home--of course, we know that life on the “old plantation” was for enslaved African Americans anything but romantic. At the same time, we can understand the song to contain evidence of the horrors of slavery: we can reasonably assume from the lyrics that the black narrator has been separated from the rest of his family--the emotional crux of the song--because white slave-owners sold him away.²²⁶ Understood this way, the song forces its audience to acknowledge both the cruelty of racial slavery and a degree of humanity within the black character in order to sympathize with him.
The home that the narrator longs for is certainly in the US South--where the Suwannee River runs between Georgia and Florida²²⁷--but the description “Far, far away” also gives its location a vague, legendary quality. The plantation represents a place more figurative than tangible. When the narrator explains that his heart is still turning at the old plantation, he symbolizes the life of love he has lost. The lyric also gives an excruciating image of one’s heart being physically elsewhere than one’s body, representing the extent of the narrator’s pain. What’s worse, the narrator has not even replaced his old home with a new, worse one; instead, he leads a life of complete placelessness: he is roaming all over creation. His loss of place causes his pain but so

²²⁶ Lott, Love and Theft. 187.
too does his loss of people. The loss of “the old folks at home”—of both people (folks) and place (home)—drives the pathos of the song.

In “Old Folks at Home” and songs like it, the minstrel mapped white American feelings of loss, nostalgia, and placelessness onto a counterfeit black body and an imagined African American narrative.\(^{228}\) Beyond the working-class concerns cited in the writings of Saxton, Barnes, and Lott, this song’s sentiments correspond to the emotions Georgetown students felt. The narrator’s permanent placelessness corresponds to what Robert Pace described as the feeling of “visiting all the time” experienced by elite young men at college.\(^{229}\) The physical discomfort and emotional pain signified by the narrator’s heart being elsewhere sounds like Randall’s memory of the physical discomfort of winter mornings at Georgetown and the sorrow that accompanied it.\(^{230}\) Furthermore, the yearning for people and place is central both to “The Old Folks at Home” and student writings on homesickness like Randall’s, in which he longed for “my mother and my home.”\(^{231}\) These minstrel themes articulated precisely the emotions of Georgetown students. It makes sense that they performed them constantly.\(^{232}\)

Students understood these nostalgic themes and consciously valued them—so much so that they maintained these themes and tropes in their own original compositions of blackface literature. That students consistently wrote and that student publications published original

\(^{228}\) Lott, *Love and Theft*. 190.
\(^{229}\) Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South*. 37.
\(^{231}\) Ibid.
\(^{232}\) In just the first five years of the 20th century, Georgetown student concerts featured this song, “Old Folks at Home,” at least three times. In addition to the previously cited two concerts in 1902, the song was included in the Annual Mi-Careme Concert of the Music Clubs in April 1905. In another example of blackface minstrelsy being tied to extracurricular tradition at Georgetown, the same song was included in the same Annual Mi-Careme Concert in 1931. See: “College Notes,” *Georgetown College Journal*, April 1905, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives. And also see: “Annual Lenten Concert Rendered,” *The Hoya*, March 18, 1931, Vol. 12, No. 21 edition, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.
minstrel material testifies to the popularity of the form in the Georgetown community. And yet, just because minstrelsy became very popular in the Georgetown community did not guarantee that all of its aspects would continue in their forms on campus. Writing original minstrel poems and songs, published in University publications and performed on campus, Hoyas could have done away with aspects of the minstrel tradition irrelevant to their experience. If the Georgetown community had engaged with minstrelsy purely for comic entertainment, student publications would not have published the more melancholy minstrel literature. Yet, the documentary record demonstrates that the community valued this aspect of minstrelsy. Not only did Hoyas perform classic minstrel songs of the melancholy mood, but they furthered the nostalgic mode in their own original writing.

“The Darkie’s Plaint,” an original minstrel song published in the *Georgetown College Journal* in May 1896, epitomizes this nostalgic mood:

I’se a sad, dejected darkie,
As griebed as I ken be,
Bekase de Yanks when dey come Sout
Dey went and sot me free.

A happy darkie wuz I den,
An’ singin’ all der day,
While grubbin’ in der big corn-fiel’
Or plowin’ up der clay.

And when der work wuz ober
I’d make my banjo ring
Wif all dem songs white folkses lub

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233 The *Georgetown College Journal* attributes the song to Zenus Barnum. Zenus Barnum was a wealthy businessman who, amongst other ventures, owned the Barnum Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland. It is unclear if Zenus Barnum himself attended Georgetown. However, his sons and grandsons attended Georgetown. One of his sons, Francis Barnum, graduated from Georgetown and went on to become a Jesuit, a faculty member at Georgetown, and Georgetown’s official archivist. See: “Death Takes Rev. Fr. Barnum, S. J.,” *The Hoya*, November 10, 1921, Vol. 3, No. 6 edition, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.

Which all der darks would sing.’

But ebber sence I said “Good-bye”
To ole Virginn’s hills
I’se nebber smelt magnoly trees
Or hyerd dem whip-poor-wills.

But, Lordy, let me see der place
Once moah befoh I die,
An’ find a grave beneaf dem flowers
Where I am soon to lie.

Again, this song is about someone who wants to return home. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the song appeared in the *Georgetown College Journal*, the longing to return to “ole Virginny’s hills” may have resonated specifically with the 60% of the undergraduate student body who actually came from D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and the other Southern states for whom “ole Virginny” was a metonym. But as we’ve seen, these feelings of homesickness were universal across the student body.

The song exhibits the slippery way minstrelsy implied racist political conclusions. The lyrics bend those universal feelings of “sadness” and “dejection” at losing one’s home towards an anti-black, pro-slavery perspective on US history. The speaker blames his sadness and placelessness on the “Yanks,” who he laments “when dey come Sout...went and sot me free.” The song frames the Union Army’s campaign into the South and the abolition of Southern slave society as wrong and harmful especially to the African Americans who came into a new freedom at the end of the Civil War. The speaker alludes to wartime emancipation as the moment in time when his life changed for the worse. The speaker demarcates this change through his grammar:

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235 These statistics are cumulative for the decade of 1880-1889, while the song appeared in 1896. See: Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*. 426.

236 Barnum, “Darkie’s Plaint.”
he sings in the present tense of his sorrow, “I’se a sad, dejected darkie,” but in the past tense of his happiness, “A happy darkie wuz I den.” Thus, the song’s nostalgia is twofold: the lyrics address nostalgia for a lost home but also for a different, lost time.

The sentimentality that minstrel songs expressed not just for home but also for the past helps explain their popularity at Georgetown. Arrival at college for Georgetown students was a moment of extreme personal change, delineating one era in their lives from another. College in the nineteenth and early twentieth century represented a rite of passage into adulthood for young elite men. As Robert Pace explains, “growing up surrounded by family and the familiar, young men [at college] shed their past and launched into a struggle for autonomy and interdependence within the adult world.” The key word here is “struggle.” Students did not complete this ritual into adulthood without emotional tension. Struggle encapsulates the tears and pain that Georgetown students, as exemplified by James Ryder Randall, experienced in their transition on campus toward adulthood.

The Georgetown sources that connect homesickness with traditions of blackface minstrelsy also draw out the conflict between childhood and adulthood. Recalling the Welcome Banquet and the traditions of his first months at Georgetown, J. Percy Keating described himself as “little homesick me,” highlighting not only his nostalgic mood but his physical smallness and youth. Likewise, Randall also wrote, “[I wondered] why such affectionate parents as mine were had condemned their little boy to such torture.” The Hoya’s editorial board, in its op-ed discussing the Welcome Banquet and blackface performance, demonstrated in its language that it

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237 Pace and Bjornsen, “Adolescent Honor and College Student Behavior in the Old South.” 10.
understood college as passage towards manhood. The op-ed referred to the freshmen audience members as “the newcomer,” but to the returning students--some of whom organized the Banquet and performed in blackface--as “the old man.” The editorial board knew that all these young men were in actual age only months apart between eighteen and twenty-two years old approximately; thus, their designation of returning students as “old men” references, instead of actual age, the symbolic journey toward adulthood over the course of a student’s time at Georgetown. Indeed, by the turn of the twentieth century through until at least the mid-twentieth century, educators and students alike in the Eastern US understood the modern university as, amongst other things, responsible for the development of the “manhood” of its male student body. The Hoya’s welcome to new students in September 1920 demonstrates that not only administrators but students themselves understood manhood as college’s objective: “It is inspiring to count the hundreds of the flower of American manhood who are choosing the mother in Blue and Gray to guide and assist them in their preparation for their life work.”

Minstrelsy spoke to the difficulties of that struggle toward manhood. Minstrel performances displayed fictional black characters who longed for a time gone by, a time characterized by happiness and ease, a time when they were in the care of paternalistic slave owners--a time very much like childhood. When student minstrels blacked up to burlesque as African Americans, they demeaned black Americans by acting childish. Audiences found this

241 “Welcome Back,” The Hoya, October 5, 1922.
theatrical childishness funny: minstrels sang songs with nonsensical lyrics, made endless puns, acted physically absurd, spoke senselessly, and thought non-logically, all for laughs.\textsuperscript{244}

Eric Lott describes the operation of minstrel show humor as a kind of “triangulation.”\textsuperscript{245} By triangulation, Lott means that the comedy of the minstrel show was a tripartite affair. The first two parties--the white audience and the white minstrels--mocked the third party: the black figure portrayed by the minstrel. The third party--the black figure--was only present via the minstrel’s mimicry; in Lott’s words, “the joker personified the person being joked about.”\textsuperscript{246} The white minstrel lent his own subjecthood to a black caricature only to make that caricature the object of racist humor. Though the minstrel mocked and objectified the black character, it was undeniably an intimate act. Because of the strange intimacy between the white subject and the imagined black object, the Georgetown student minstrel and his audience could find pleasure in performing and indulging the simple-mindedness and childishness of their black caricatures--behaviors that students otherwise sought to shed. In addition to the feelings of racial supremacy this mockery provided, students could take a separate pleasure in the sheer childishness of the play. This kind of comedy, Lott says, presented an opportunity for “spectators to indulge in lost moments of childish pleasure evoked by the antics of children.”\textsuperscript{247} The blackface performance at the onset of the school year allowed the homesick “newcomers” and so-called “old men”\textsuperscript{248} watching and performing in Ryan Refectory to indulge once more the pleasures of childhood.

\textsuperscript{244} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}. 143.
\textsuperscript{245} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}. 142.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}. 143.
\textsuperscript{248} “Welcome Back,” \textit{The Hoya}, October 5, 1922.
Just as blackface minstrelsy provided an opportunity for political expression on campus during the Civil War when authorities forbade it, it similarly allowed students to express nostalgia for home, for childhood and to play out the exact behaviors had to be abandoned to successfully navigate college as a rite of passage towards adulthood.

Off the minstrel stage, the ideals of manhood that governed everyday life at Georgetown, and other elite colleges like it, allowed little patience for the sentimental emotions expressed behind the blackface mask. As we have seen, it’s not that Hoyas denied the existence of sentimentality amongst the student body. For example, in 1874, the editors of the *Georgetown College Journal* clearly explain and seem to sympathize with homesick students: “The new-comer may have left his home and its endearments for the first time, to find himself domiciled in a house where all is strange to him, and where some things are perhaps antagonistic to his tastes: while his new found companions, civil as they may be, ill replace the friends from whom he has parted. This case becomes, if the situation be dwelt upon, a genuine one of homesickness.” Rather than invalidate these emotions, the *Journal*’s editors first recognize them and then frame them as a challenge for students to overcome in their journey toward manhood during college. “But if the sufferer will doggedly stifle his yearnings,” they continue, “and remember that he is to be, if he is not yet, a man...he will conquer his weakness as others have done theirs, before him.” The editors can understand the newcomer’s sentimentality because he is “not yet” a man but a boy; however, because “he is to be” a man by the end of college, he must “stifle his yearnings” for his lost home and his lost folk, and for lost time.

249 For a discussion of the Jesuit’s policy of political neutrality during the Civil War see: Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*. 226.
251 “Pluck II.” 54.
Referencing those men who came before the new student, the editors set the struggle to overcome nostalgia within a masculine tradition and make the new students its inheritors. And yet, we have seen how a different masculine tradition at Georgetown—the practice of blackface minstrelsy—foregrounded these exact emotions of nostalgia and sentimentality that the editors urged newcomers to get over, that the standards of manhood discouraged in everyday life on campus.

The sentimental aspects of blackface minstrelsy—those themes obvious in famous songs like “Old Folks at Home” or in Georgetown originals like “Darkie’s Plaint”—opposed the masculine ideals that students strove for in college. And yet, the blackface performers were lauded as exemplary Georgetown men alongside the President of the Yard and the athletic team captains at the Welcome Banquet.

I don’t point out this contradiction to criticize Georgetown students in the past. To paraphrase one famous enthusiast of blackface minstrelsy, people contradict themselves, they are large and contain multitudes. I simply want to recognize the contradictions minstrelsy

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252 Foster, “Old Folks at Home.”
253 Barnum, “Darkie’s Plaint.”
254 As I will make even more clear in the third chapter, student blackface minstrels were often some of the most successful, most respected students on campus. Those who wore blackface on stage were not ostracized for their choice; student publications consistently lauded their performances. What’s more, student minstrels participated in other normal college activities that persist on campus today. The same students who performed in the serious Dramatic Association student theater productions also appear on the cast lists of minstrel shows. The Dahlgren brothers, who seem to have had their hands in everything on campus during their time at Georgetown in the 1880s and after whom the central quadrangle and chapel on campus are named, performed in minstrel shows. The entire crew team put on a blackface minstrel show at a professional theater as a fundraiser in 1910. As previously discussed, the 1950 Senior Class Gift Committee, with the guidance of their faculty advisor Father Gallagher, organized a minstrel show. The founders of the Georgetown Chimes, the most prestigious men’s singing group at Georgetown, performed in minstrel shows.
256 At a time in the mid-nineteenth century when many thinkers were concerned with the development of a distinct American culture, Walt Whitman championed minstrelsy as an example of an original American artform. He understood minstrelsy as the Americanization of the traditions of both Italian opera and English ballad-style music.
contained on campus. Analysis of the sentimental aspect of minstrelsy’s content and student’s pointed use of it at particular moments of homesickness in the year reveals the minstrel stage to be a site of cultural conflict at Georgetown (we have already seen it to be a site of political conflict).

This isn’t a new insight: historians have already recognized how blackface performance presented an opportunity for cultural negotiation. As Lott writes, “the popular [of which he takes blackface minstrelsy as an example]...is itself a crucial place of contestation, with moments of resistance to the dominant culture as well as moments of supersession.” Yet--as is obvious from the subject of the sentence I just quoted from Lott (“the popular”)--scholars have analyzed minstrelsy as an exemplar of popular, folk, working-class culture. From that analysis, scholars discerned this cultural framework as unique to the popular: again to quote Lott, “research into popular culture has allowed us to see the popular...as a sphere characterized by cultural forms of social and political conflict” as opposed to “other parts of the social formation.” But, approaching blackface minstrelsy from a different “part of the social formation,” we have seen that elites at Georgetown not only practiced blackface and valued it as significant to community


258 Ibid.

life; what’s more, it also presented for the Georgetown community a site of social and political conflict.

In a sense, conflict is a theme itself of blackface minstrelsy. We have tracked the conflicted sentimentality of blackface characters but, more precisely to the theme of conflict, historians have done the work to document the disorder that minstrels put on display. This other well-documented theme of blackface minstrelsy--the unruliness of the minstrel show--presents another contradiction to the culture of a place like Georgetown as historians have traditionally portrayed it.

As previously discussed, violent mobs throughout the nineteenth century used blackface minstrel songs and theatrical practices. From minstrelsy’s very beginning, contemporary commentators recognized this association between blackface conventions and disorder: recall how the Boston Post in 1834 described white nativist rioters who wore blackface and sang “Jump Jim Crow” as “midnight leaders of misrule.”

Later scholars have harped on the dangerous and pleasurable thrill audiences got from the minstrel show as a “rowdy spectacle.” Minstrels appeared vulgar: they wore garish costumes--be they gaudy rags or ostentatious tuxedos--and made their faces up with frighteningly wide mouths with bulging red lips and moon-white eyes. Minstrels contorted their masked faces, made lurid jokes, and sang with over-exaggerated emotion; they led the whole theater house in claps and chants and sometimes left stage and entered the crowd; on stage, they cackled at one another, hopped up and down from their seats on stage, clog-danced,

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260 Cockrell, Demons of Disorder, 185.
261 Lott, Love and Theft. 9.
and babbled and argued in pejorative, nonsense speech. Blackface minstrels performed a show that was “boisterous to the point of grotesqueness.”

As previously discussed, the intimacy of the white minstrel subject with the black object he portrayed allowed minstrels and their audience to not only laugh at imagined black objects for such savage behavior but also to take pleasure in that behavior. A review of an on-campus blackface performance in 1885 hints at the intimacy the student body understood existed between the white subject and black object. In the concluding lines of the review, the *Georgetown College Journal* commends one particular student minstrel for his closeness to his character. “We should not omit to notice the very natural presentation of the plantation darkey by Chas. Heard, of St. Mary’s County, Md.” the review concluded: “It was true to the life.”

Rather than comment on Heard’s derisive comedy or skill as an entertainer, the reviews commends him for the trueness of his blackface performance, how black he really seemed. What the review appreciates is not his racist derision—a comic process that depends on distance to critique the racial object—but instead Heard’s perceived proximity to blackness. The audience took pleasure in his nearly becoming black.

This pleasure, that violated the orderliness that governed campus life, roused and frightened all involved. One of the great writers of the twentieth century, Ralph Ellison, explained that “When the white man steps behind the mask of the [blackface] trickster his

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266 “Our Minstrels.” *Georgetown College Journal*, December 1885.
freedom is circumscribed by the fear that he is not simply miming a personification of his disorder and chaos but that he will become in fact that which he intends only to symbolize.”

Ellison fixes the “disorder and chaos” of the minstrel show as the force that attracted white Americans to minstrelsy; but, he explains, even as they took pleasure in it they also struggled not to succumb to it.

Ellison’s insight bears out on audiences at Georgetown just as well as on those working class audiences about which he wrote. So thrillingly chaotic and disorderly were the minstrel shows that audiences at Georgetown began themselves to take on the themes of unruliness exhibited on stage.

The *Georgetown College Journal* described how the audience at an 1887 blackface minstrel show on campus began to follow the frenzied drive that the minstrels performed on stage. “The house [was],” the *Georgetown College Journal* explained, “in one continuous roar of laughter.” Both the animalistic language describing the young men (their “roar”) and their action as one mob-like entity hints at how the audience flirted with the dangerous power that Ellison talked about. At the blackface clog-dancing of student minstrel William Donnelly, the crowd became so worked up that they “would not rest contented until he made his appearance before them several times.” In a state of unrest, the audience grew so excited that it imposed its will on the student minstrel, demanding he return again and again.

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This was not unusual: often, student crowds became more crazed over the course of a minstrel show, growing hungrier for more of a particular blackface act. At a musical revue in March 1900 that included blackface performance, the blackface minstrel performers sang “with such vim that it was difficult to control one’s feelings.” Eventually, the audience fully lost control of their feelings at the “inimitable” blackface performance of a student named George O’Connor. In point of fact, it may have been the performers who had lost control. O’Connor finished his planned performance “but,” the Georgetown College Journal reported, “the audience must have more.” O’Connor conceded and sang four more songs. William McAleer, Jr., a student and a member of the audience that evening, wrote a letter to the editor of the Georgetown College Journal remembering the concert: “O’Connor,” McAleer wrote, “was not allowed to make his exit until he sang a touching duet” that the audience demanded. In the passive voice, McAleer alludes to the extreme power he and his fellow audience members exercised over the show. Inverting the regular structure of control, the audience allowed or disallowed the minstrels to exit. Student crowds’ rowdy behavior at minstrel shows did not exist outside or separate from what was the ideal behavior of a Georgetown student. Indeed, after O’Connor’s coerced

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271 A rather ironic adjective choice given the fact that the entire act was in fact racist imitation. The strange way in which the student journalists are unaware of the irony of their word choice hearkens back to the idea that blackface performance somehow offered something authentically black.
272 The Georgetown College Journal reported that O’Connor “sang a couple of coon songs in his inimitable way.” See: “College Notes,” 302.
273 “College Notes,” 302.
274 Ibid.
blackface encores, the concert concluded when all of the different performers gathered on stage
to sing the alma mater “Sons of Georgetown,” which implores Georgetown students to,

Wave her colors ever,
Furl her standard never,
But raise it high
And proudly cry,
‘We’re Georgetown’s sons forever.’

The overt confluence of students’ Georgetown pride and their concomitant honor code
with the unruliness of the minstrel show complicates one aspect of the life of a Georgetown
student: for the sake of argument, we can call this aspect of life at Georgetown “ruliness,” the
way that students imposed a strict code of rules to live by.

Students’ indulgence in the loss of control that characterized minstrel shows contrasts
with the orderly way students lived outside of the minstrel theater. Understanding the ruliness of
everyday life for students in the postbellum nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth
centuries allows us to understand why students particularly cherished the permitted pleasure of
the disorder of the minstrel show. The editors of the 1943 Georgetown yearbook summed up
exactly this function of blackface performance--the joy students took in raising hell while
wearing blackface--when they titled a passage describing a student-written minstrel show on
campus that year, “Rollicking Revelry.” Such rollicking revelry differed from the way that
Georgetown students in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries designed,
imposed, and aspired to live by strict codes of behavior aimed at self-improvement and
manliness.\textsuperscript{279}

Living by such rules made up an important part of the project to become adults that young men at college took on. Students in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at colleges like Georgetown struggled to enter manhood by upholding a strict code of honor.\textsuperscript{280} They attempted to follow a set of behaviors “handed down by parents and other influential adults” while simultaneously trying to create “an ‘adult’ culture of their very own that focused on their peer group and involved a peer-designed code of honor.”\textsuperscript{281}

On Sunday, October 1, 1922--the day of the Welcome Banquet--the ruliness of college life\textsuperscript{282} that scholars have documented coincided with the unruliness of the college minstrel show that we have traced. As the title and content of the Welcome Banquet suggests, that first day of October initiated new students into the Georgetown community. The Banquet officially demarcated the end of their childhoods and the beginning of their collegiate journey toward adulthood; it replaced their old homes with a new one.\textsuperscript{283} In order to initiate the newcomers into

\begin{footnotes}
\item[280] Pace and Bjornsen, “Adolescent Honor and College Student Behavior in the Old South.” 12.
\item[281] Ibid.
\item[282] We have seen in the previously noted example of detention in the “jug” the harshness of discipline at Georgetown in the nineteenth century. Though this section will go on to discuss student imposed rules in the 1920s, Georgetown remained incredibly regimented well into the 1950s. For example, during the 1950s, students were required to be return to their dorm rooms after dinner; prefects checked in on them nightly at 7, 9, 10, and 11 o’clock, when students had to go to sleep. If one was a veteran having served in World War II, he was not subjected to the frequent checks but his lights-out time was still 11 PM. See: Robert Emmett Curran, \textit{A History of Georgetown: The Quest for Excellence 1889-1964}, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010). 241.
\item[283] We have seen how the sentimentality of the minstrel show helped address the resulting homesickness through expressing nostalgia for an imagined past of ease and an imagined home in an ahistorical, mythical South.
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this new life and begin their journey toward manhood, upperclassmen imposed a stringent set of rules on Freshmen--they called them the “Freshman Rules.”

At noon on the same Sunday as the Welcome Banquet in the evening, freshmen met the deadline for memorizing the official songs and yells of the college. The “Freshman Rules” demanded they commit these school cheers to memory by midday. Decreed by the upperclassman elected “President of the Yard” and his student council, the “Freshman Rules” were a condescending set of directives published in *The Hoya* annually in the fall semester concerning freshman behavior.

Mostly, these rules stipulated absurd deference for upperclassmen. “The problem of putting a new man in his place on his entrance to a university from the country school, public high and private prep is an important one, for it is a primary necessity to the maintenance of order that seniority be respected,” explained the same issue of *The Hoya* that reported on the Welcome Banquet, “The frosh on coming to college is generally obsessed with his own importance, and unless the strong arm is immediately placed upon him his conduct may lead him astray. Hence the Freshmen Rules.” In their own words, the upperclassmen intended for the “Freshman Rules” to maintain Georgetown as a space of “order.” The called-for etiquette included the requirement that freshmen always be first to greet upperclassmen in their


285 “Freshman Rules” and “It Can Be Done!”

interactions and that freshmen yield the right of way of all campus facilities to upperclassmen, including telephone booths but with the exclusion of tennis and handball courts.\textsuperscript{287}

As part of the journey toward adulthood, the older students explained that the “Freshman Rules” made up part of an important project to foster communal pride and unity. To use the exact words of a September 1920 \textit{Hoya} article, “Freshman Rules” ultimately helped develop “a oneness of purpose, a spirit of comradeship, and the firm, glad handshake of friendship [at Georgetown].”\textsuperscript{288} How did the “Freshman Rules” aid in this project?: “The tendency is, in the prep school and the high school, to ‘play up’ the individual,” the article explains, “In after life a man, to be a success, must realize that oftentimes he must subordinate self for his own good and that of others.”\textsuperscript{289} Thus, the self-discipline the rules required served the students by guiding them to live like men.

The newspaper editors paralleled their desire for unity at Georgetown--one part of the project toward manhood that the “Freshman Rules” would help realize--to the state of the nation: “There is no South, no North in the United States today, just one great country with the Texan and the Vermonter rivaling each other in loyalty to the one ideal,” wrote the \textit{Hoya’s} editors when expounding on the purpose of the “Freshman Rules.” “If Georgetown does not wish to be washed backward with the driftwood,” they concluded, “there must be unity.”\textsuperscript{290}

This passage typifies the way that Georgetown students after the Civil War and up until the second World War consistently conflated the language of school pride with that of national unity. Indeed, the student body adopted blue and gray as the official colors of the university in

\textsuperscript{287}“Freshman Rules.”
\textsuperscript{288} “It Can Be Done!”
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
the 1870s to symbolize the reunification and reconciliation they hoped to carry out in their generation between the North, represented by Union blue, and the South, represented by Confederate gray. Students referenced national reconciliation in explicitly masculine terms, wearing colors that signified resolution of the all-male armies of the Union and the rebels in the South. Because they understood the reconciliation movement as a project in harmony amongst men, the students figured that it made a good metaphor for their project for masculine harmony on campus and, concurrently, understood their collegiate project as contributing to the national movement for unity. The upperclassmen imposed strict order hoping to foster fraternity amongst their student body—the honorable young men of Georgetown—and, in turn, do their part in a national movement of reconciliation.

291 In 1876, the Georgetown Boat Club first sported blue and gray as their official club colors when competing against the boat clubs from other colleges. By the late 1870s, the student body generally began to wear the blue and gray as the recognizable college hat. One bit from the campus news in brief section of the Georgetown College Journal edition of July 1877 reads: “The new University hat,’ with ribbon of blue and gray, the Boat Club colors, is very generally adopted here, and is really a most becoming hat for young persons.” The Boat Song—the fight song of the Georgetown University Boat Club, penned in 1876, performed at regular Boat Club fundraisers, at which the students (and even professors) often performed in blackface—makes use of the historical meaning of the colors. The song’s final verse goes:

Still on! The Blue our pennon bears,
To triumph leads the way
Or, if we fail we still shall hold
To honor with the Gray.

The rhetoric of national reconciliation—a national, white political ideology that excused the Southern rebellion and glorified the defeat of the Confederacy—runs through the documentary record of the Georgetown University archives from the beginning of the end of Reconstruction in the mid-1870s (when the GU Boat Club and then the rest of the student body adopted blue and gray as its colors) into the 1930s. In the 1920s, student publications explicitly connected the imposition of ruliness on the freshmen in order to cultivate a unified, masculine community to the national project of reconciliation. The lifespan of this rhetoric at Georgetown squares with its dominance over national culture. Minstrelsy once again connected to these seemingly disparate, undeniably significant aspects of Georgetown culture.

As we have already seen, these seemingly separate parts of Georgetown culture—blackface minstrelsy and the project toward manhood that depended on ruliness and analogized itself to national reconciliation—existed alongside one another. Remember how the crowd at a 1900 musical revue first grew unruly, demanding multiple encores of the blackface performance section, only to finish the night by joining in the alma mater “Sons of Georgetown,” the lyrics of which urge the disciplined “sons” to protect their mother, the feminized Georgetown, and specifically to use their “reverent hands” to “enwound her with the blue and gray.”

Twenty two years after that performance, students used minstrelsy in the same way. On the day we’ve investigated, October 1, 1922, upperclassmen initiated new students by testing

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292 W. E. B. Du Bois best explained the dangerous phenomenon in his 1935 book *Black Reconstruction*: “We fell under the leadership of those who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present and guide policy in the future.”

293 Specifically this corresponds to the time frame in which white Americans organized to memorialize the Confederacy across the country. See: Ernsberger Jr., “‘Cause They Lost.”

294 “College Notes,” 302 and “CARMEN GEORGIOPOLITANUM,” 67.
them on the “Freshman Rules” during the day and, in the evening, throwing a Welcome Banquet that culminated in a blackface performance. Now we understand why such a banquet would climax with blackface minstrelsy.

At this performance of blackface minstrelsy, homesick students could indulge their unmanly sentimentality and nostalgia for lost people, a lost time, and a lost place. As a result of his sentimentality, the blackface minstrel romanticized a lost South, reaffirming an important claim of reconciliation rhetoric—the rhetoric in which students continuously framed their own quest for brotherhood on campus. At that blackface performance, students beginning their journey toward manhood could enjoy the minstrel’s racist yet evocative childishness. Students aspiring to a new level of discipline so as to become men could take momentary pleasure in the chaos and disorder allowed in the imagined black figure on stage.

No wonder the event celebrated the blackface performer as one of the most important figures in student life alongside the “President of the Yard” and other student leaders: the student minstrel spoke to the young students’ nostalgia, reminded them of childhood, enticed them with unruliness, and connected their project to build collegiate community to a national movement. Wearing a blackface mask, he allowed for a smooth welcome into white manhood.
Chapter 4

“Down the Dear Dusky Line”: Blackface Minstrels Around the Year, Blackface Minstrels Do It All

To explain the arguments of this following chapter it once again behooves us to return to John Gilmary Shea’s centennial history of Georgetown. Shea’s focus on blackface minstrelsy as a historical signifier for the relative health of Georgetown culture from the Civil War until his publication in 1889 suggests the arguments I’ll put forward in this chapter. Shea’s history has already exemplified to us the centrality of minstrelsy to life on campus--thus it made for a good measurement of a return to normalcy after the war. His history also made clear that blackface performance represented a common, meaningful touchstone for generations of Hoyas--thus it made for a good example to connect to an alumni readership. But we can read Shea’s inclusion of blackface minstrelsy in his history even more deeply than we already have to show additional reasons that Hoyas found minstrelsy so important.

Rather than discuss minstrel shows from a national perspective or in terms of changing national politics, Shea discusses minstrel shows only as they related to specific changes at Georgetown, e.g. the return of regular extracurricular activity. His localized approach suggests the way that Hoyas customized minstrel shows for their particular environment on campus, making them extremely personal endeavors.

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296 Remember how Shea wrote: “The old life revived. The Officer’s Feasts were again enjoyed with zest. The Contrabands gave a concert after the negro minstrel type, and a baseball club was formed…” See: Shea, 293.
Shea’s eager inclusion of minstrelsy in the official history of Georgetown—a project that faculty and alumni called for and commissioned at the university’s celebrations of the centennial in February 1889—shows that Hoyas not only felt that minstrelsy was important to campus culture but acceptable in such an official book. Not only did Hoyas hold minstrel shows dear—a point that I have hopefully shown to be true and will prove further in this chapter—but they authorized it. In other words, minstrelsy on campus was legitimate.

That it was the special occasion of the Centennial that inspired the writing on minstrelsy (along with the rest of the book) reflects a pattern in the history of blackface performance on campus: Georgetown students blacked up and put on minstrel shows at the most special times of the year. Students’ inclusion of blackface performance in events like the Welcome Banquet, the banquet discussed in Chapter 3, exemplifies this practice. In this chapter, we will explore how students performed in blackface to celebrate holidays, both secular and religious, through the year.

Shea writes about minstrelsy inside of a book that, he explains, aims to tell “the history of an institution that initiated, however humbly, the higher education of Catholics in the United States and whose development has always been closely linked with the general progress of college and university teaching in our country.” Shea celebrates the subject of his work as a history that “cannot be lacking in permanent interest to scholars, can never be considered untimely.” Shea described his book as a case for Georgetown’s relevance to US history,

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297 The preface reads: “The enthusiasm with which the Centenary of our College was celebrated, both by the Alumni and the general public, on February 20th, 21st and 22d, 1889, led to the suggestion from many who took part in the festivities of that occasion that a commemorative volume should be issued.” See: Shea, vii.
298 Shea, vii.
299 Ibid.
Catholic American history, and the history of higher education generally. In contrast to the historians who write about blackface minstrelsy and frame it as an icon of working class, folk culture in the second half of the twentieth century, Shea did not see the theater form as contradictory to his argument for Georgetown as an elite space of excellence--rather, he used minstrelsy as evidence within his argument. Thus, we begin to understand minstrelsy connection to Hoyas’ identity as Catholic, American elites and that for them minstrelsy did not contradict their ambitions to become young white elites as scholars, professionals, clergy, and statesmen. On the contrary, Georgetown community members cherished blackface minstrelsy. Shea’s regard for the theater form only begins to evince the passion with which Georgetown students practiced it.

We have already witnessed minstrelsy’s inclusion in official spaces, figurative and literal. As discussed, students and administrators celebrated blackface performance in their student and University publications; what’s more, students frequently published original minstrel songs and poems in those publications. Students staged blackface performance in official spaces on campus. The Welcome Banquet of 1922 occurred in Ryan Refectory, the on-campus space that hosted the most important events during the 1920s.

In addition to annual Welcome Back Banquets, Ryan Refectory was the site for faculty-sponsored New Years Eve banquets, banquets on university holidays, banquets in

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300 Further in this chapter, I will give more examples of student written and published song lyrics and poems in pejorative dialect with that take up the themes and conventions of the minstrel show. See my earlier discussion of this trend with regards to Zenus Barnum, “Darkie’s Plaint,” Georgetown College Journal, May 1896, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.
301 “Welcome Banquet Spirited Affair,” The Hoya, October 1, 1925, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.
302 “New Year’s Feast in Ryan Hall,” The Hoya, January 17, 1924, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.
honor of particular Jesuits and a banquet to introduce a new university president. University organizers chose Ryan Refectory to throw banquets at which bishops, diplomats, and government officials were in attendance. In the same space that student leaders performed in blackface, the student council held a special event to distribute the new student constitution. Students did not sneak off to participate in and attend minstrel shows as a secret indulgence; they put them on at the heart of campus, in a space associated with prestige. Even in the 1920s, in the age of the speakeasy, blackface performance took place out in the open; more specifically, it took place in an exclusive, elite but communal space, within Georgetown’s vaunted halls.

Even so, Georgetown students also performed minstrelsy off-campus--and in professional theaters at that! On May 7, 1910, the Georgetown Crew Team put on a minstrel show at the Belasco Theatre, just north of the White House, to raise funds to travel to a national tournament in Poughkeepsie, New York. The cover of the evening’s program contained the university’s seal in sparkling blue on gray background. The middle pages of the program present the minstrel show in the repulsive language we expect of blackface performance, with details like the names of the student cast under the heading “SYNCOPATED COON SHOUTERS.”

However, perhaps unexpectedly, directly above and below the details of the minstrel show are advertisements for a men’s high-end tailoring shop and a real estate and employer’s insurance

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304.“Student Banquet at Noon,” The Hoya, October 16, 1924, Digital Georgetown: University Publications, Georgetown University Archives.
305 Ibid.
308 See Image Appendix, Image 6.1.
309 “Georgetown University Minstrels and Comedy for Benefit of Poughkeepsie Crew Fund: Belasco Theatre.”
broker.\textsuperscript{310} The advertisements address a class separate from the kinds of people that historians typically depict as minstrel audiences--rowdy audiences of working-class men who would have little need for a broker advertising insurance policies on large pieces of real estate and employed no one.\textsuperscript{311} Such advertisements as well as blurbs from representatives of the university’s graduate programs--the Medical, Dental, and Law Departments--in a program for a minstrel show put on a professional theater evinces how Georgetown blackface performances existed within a professional milieu.\textsuperscript{312}

Flipping through the program before arriving at the cast list and order of minstrel songs, an audience member would find handsome photographic portraits of the Crew Team’s coach, the captains, and the team manager.\textsuperscript{313} J. D. Murphy, the team captain, faces the camera straight on as a captain should; wearing his crew sweater with a large “G,” he stands on the dock by the Potomac where he presumably leads his team to victory.\textsuperscript{314} W. L. Byrne, the team manager, is shown wearing a large collar and jacket; he is well groomed, hair slicked back, face clean-shaven; he stares down the camera in a well-lit studio portrait taken in semi-profile.\textsuperscript{315} Yet, none of the crew team members and student performers appearing on stage would look like this; they would be wearing greasepaint or brunt cork on their face to burlesque as African Americans. The

\textsuperscript{310} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{311} For an example of this kind of writing about minstrel audiences see Toll, \textit{Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America}, 12-13 and Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World}, 149.
\textsuperscript{312} “Georgetown University Minstrels and Comedy for Benefit of Poughkeepsie Crew Fund: Belasco Theatre.”
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{314} “Georgetown University Minstrels and Comedy for Benefit of Poughkeepsie Crew Fund: Belasco Theatre.” See Image Appendix, Image 6.2.
\textsuperscript{315} “Georgetown University Minstrels and Comedy for Benefit of Poughkeepsie Crew Fund: Belasco Theatre.” See Image Appendix, Image 6.3.
program presents the students so honorably just before they perform a minstrel show, burlesquing as dishonored people.

Not only did Georgetown students perform in blackface but student minstrels were often incredibly successful students--the kind deserving of leadership positions and published portraits. Even the revered Dahlgren brothers of Washington, D. C., Eric B. Dahlgren and John Vinton Dahlgren, performed in minstrel shows.316 Both were prize winning students and campus leaders while undergraduates,317 when John Vinton Dahlgren died young in 1899, only ten years after graduating, the Georgetown College Journal ran a ten page obituary for the man.318 Indeed, the obituary may have been so effusive on account of the fact that Dahlgren and his wife had donated $30,000 to build the Dahlgren Memorial Chapel of the Sacred Heart--the principle sacred space that stands at the heart of Georgetown’s campus still today and holds mass for the Georgetown community each week.319 From the laying of its cornerstone onward, the quadrangle that the chapel sits on--the physical and social heart of campus before the construction of the chapel known simply as the Quadrangle--came to be known as Dahlgren Quad.320

John Vinton and his brother Eric Dahlgren, himself a celebrated actor and orator on campus, did not understand performing in blackface as contradictory to their honorable status on

316 For evidence of their performance in a minstrel show see the cast list in: Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “Thanksgiving Eve at Georgetown College” 1885, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives.
campus as young “gentlemen,” as the College Journal described them in 1887. Student performers like the Dahlgrens drew no distinction between so-called lowbrow culture and highbrow culture as historians of blackface have. For example, in the early 1860s, the very same student actors who acted in the Dramatic Association’s production of Hamlet also acted in a blackface satire called Gimlet. What’s more, at Georgetown, minstrelsy actually informed and supported so-called highbrow cultural forms, not the other way around. In an article from January 1886, the College Journal remembered one specific student minstrel troupe that had recently disbanded. The College Journal muses that “one of the good things accomplished by the [recently disbanded] minstrel troupe...was the development of an amount of musical talent which has remained hidden for years. Thanks to the ex-members of the troupe a chorus deep and strong has been formed…” So popular and important was minstrelsy to the cultural life of Georgetown--high or low--that in the 1880s it served as the foundation of all student musical performance.

The centrality of blackface minstrelsy to music at Georgetown persisted long after the College Journal’s insight into its foundational value to the music scene. In 1948, the Georgetown Chimes, the oldest and premier singing group on campus, performed a minstrel show in concert

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321 “Commencement Day.”
323 Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “First Performance of the ‘Contrabands’ of Georgetown College.”
325 “Editorial Page.”
with Mask and Bauble, the oldest and premier dramatic group.\textsuperscript{326} The program lists founding members of the Georgetown Chimes in the show’s cast, including Frank Jones, Jack Farrell, and Chuck Laiosa.\textsuperscript{327} Tellingly, Chuck Laiosa plays a blackface character called “Chuckus,” a play on the archetypical minstrel character “Rastus,” a northern dandy character.\textsuperscript{328} The Chimes were making an inside joke to each other and the audience, changing the prototypical character name to something close to their friend Chuck Laiosa’s real name. This kind of improvisation had always been a part of minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{329} Even so, the way that Georgetown students personalized and localized minstrel material only further exhibits their deep connection to the form. For example, at that 1948 Chimes-Mask and Bauble blackface show, the performers billed themselves as “Ye Olde Hoya Minstrels,” referencing both the college’s mascot as well as the alleged language of the college’s founder John Carroll who began “Ye Olde George Towne College.”\textsuperscript{330} They weren’t the first student minstrels to customize blackface conventions to make specific Georgetown references: an 1864 student minstrel show program includes a student written song in pejorative dialect all about the “Georgetown hash,” the particularly unappealing breakfast


\textsuperscript{327} For their participation see the cast list in Image Appendix, Image 10.2 from “‘Ye Olde Hoya Minstrels’ Program,” 1948, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives. For their status as founding members see: urran, \textit{A History of Georgetown: The Quest for Excellence 1889-1964}. 242.

\textsuperscript{328} See the cast list in Image Appendix, Image 10.2 from “‘Ye Olde Hoya Minstrels’ Program,” 1948, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives. For an explanation of the character Rastus see: Ayers et al., “The Faces of Racism.”

\textsuperscript{329} Toll, \textit{Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America}. 53-55.

served to students in the dining hall. Students personalized minstrel material and used it to comment specifically on matters of daily life within the Georgetown community; its bearing on the personal lives of audiences and performers made it that much more meaningful.

Its relevance to daily life might explain the vibrancy of the minstrel show as an aspect of campus culture. Quite often, minstrel troupes disbanded and new ones formed. We have reviewed how the Chimes, Mask and Bauble, the Dahlgren brothers, the Crew Team, the Class of 1950 Senior Gift Committee, the organizers of the Welcome Banquet, performers at annual musical revues, student writers in the *College Journal*, and the Contrabands took up minstrelsy, not to mention other student minstrel troupes I will touch on shortly. All these varied performing groups and campus organizations put on minstrel shows. The genre was not the exclusive domain of a particular group but rather a common currency on campus.

It was a currency employed at the most important moments. Minstrel shows helped pace the rhythm of the year and signify its most special moments. Students blacked up on the year’s most important days.

Thanksgiving 1885 was just such an occasion. A newspaper clipping titled “Thanksgiving Eve at Georgetown College” advertised to students and other Washingtonians an evening of holiday celebration offered on campus the evening before Thanksgiving. Those who came enjoyed a minstrel show performed by a brand new collegiate minstrel group as the first half of the “Thanksgiving Eve” ceremonies. On Wednesday evening, November 25, 1885,

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332 Ibid.
333 Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “Thanksgiving Eve at Georgetown College” 1885, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives. See Image Appendix, Image 12.
the Georgetown University Minstrel Troupe--this new blackface ensemble--gave their inaugural performance.

While this minstrel troupe was new, so too was Thanksgiving on campus. The student body and faculty of Georgetown had only begun celebrating Thanksgiving and receiving time off from class for the holiday in the 1850s, though other American communities had been celebrating since the eighteenth century. The minstrel show in 1885 was thus part of an evolving three decades old tradition of celebrating what many at Georgetown referred to as “Yankee Christmas.” They blacked up in order to celebrate a holiday that they understood foremost from a Catholic paradigm, terming Thanksgiving and Independence Day republican high feast days or civic “holy days”. Thanksgiving day celebrations exemplified this mix of American identity with a distinctly Catholic one: the day after the minstrel program, celebrations began with a high mass in the morning followed by a US Marine Band concert and turkey dinner in the evening.

Just as Perry’s sailors did when they sailed into Tokyo Harbor, Georgetown students chose blackface conventions in a moment at which they felt they needed to clearly articulate their Americanness. The November 1904 edition of the College Journal included a student-written minstrel song on its front page titled “November.” In the song, written in pejorative dialect, a blackface character remembers how autumn for him signified his master’s generosity: “I heah Ole Marster tellin’ me in years dat’s done behin’/Dat he aint a gwine fo’git

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335 Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 175.
336 Ibid.
337 Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889. 176.
me when it’s time fo’ cake an’ wine.” But this black character also associates the natural elements of November—in his words, the time when “de sparrows pokin’ ’roun’;/ De leaves is mighty crackly”—with the American rituals of Thanksgiving, specifically the turkey dinner. Perhaps because of his ascribed and derogatory stupidity, the blackface character does not understand Thanksgiving from a Catholic perspective as students tended to. Through an imagined black character, Georgetown students could circumvent their Catholic paradigm and take on a singularly American connection the holiday.

While the advertisement for the Thanksgiving minstrel show of 1885 evinces this strategy, the advertisements surrounding it speak again to the ease with which elites at Georgetown dealt in a so-called theater form. Surrounding the new minstrel troupe’s ad, advertisements for luxury items such as men’s clothing imported from Italy and new carriages represent how minstrelsy was part and parcel of bourgeois life at Georgetown in the late nineteenth century.

What’s more, the advertisements, many of which style themselves as perfect gifts, point towards another time of year that Georgetown students regularly blacked up: Christmas. Just as they did for Thanksgiving, Georgetown students put on minstrel shows to celebrate Christmas and wrote poems or songs in pejorative dialect about Christmas. Like the student-written Thanksgiving minstrel songs, the Christmas pejorative songs focus on the remembered generosity of masters and mistresses at the holiday season as well as the natural signs of the

339 “November.”
340 Ibid.
341 Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “Thanksgiving Eve at Georgetown College.”
changing seasons. In an original student blackface poem titled “Christmas Fo’ de War,” the
speaker excitedly explains why the season is special, “Kase Chris’mus times ez kumin’, en old
Missus sho’ will treat.” And just as the speaker of the student-written Thanksgiving pejorative
poem did, the speaker of the Christmas poem takes particular interest in nature’s signals of
time’s passage. The poem begins “When Jack,” meaning Jack Frost, “hez teched de walnut en de ole puh’simmon trees./Twell de walnuts en de ’simmons tumble down...En de snow ez mighty hebby on de groun.” The poems’ focus on time--they recall the falling of leaves, the coming of snow, one is even titled “November”--reflects this other function of blackface performance on campus: Georgetown students used minstrel shows, a practice we have seen was important to campus culture, to commemorate the most important times of the year.

In addition to Thanksgiving and Christmas, students commemorated Mardi Gras with minstrel shows. Utilizing the disorder characteristic to the minstrel show, Georgetown students co-opted an American theater form to service a preexisting Catholic carnival tradition that, like the minstrel show, reversed identities and unleashed that which was usually disallowed. What’s more, according to Mardi Gras historian Reid Mitchell, the particular type of Mardi Gras celebration at which Georgetown students performed minstrel shows--the Bal Masque--was an exclusive practice of the most elite, established, and privileged Catholic Americans. Despite

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343 Whiteley, “Christmas Fo’ de War.”
344 Ibid.
347 Mitchell, All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival. 97-98.
minstrelsy’s historiographic label of “lowbrow,” Hoyas at the end of the nineteenth century regularly included it in such an elite practice.  

The Mardi Gras program from the college’s 1895 Bal Masque physically juxtaposes the highbrow and lowbrow on its pages, demonstrating the comfortability of Georgetown elites with the so-called lowbrow form of minstrelsy. The third page of the program detailing the cast and songs of the blackface minstrel show is sandwiched between a first page that presents a Greek inscription and a third page that gives the program of the Bal Masque, an exclusively elite practice. The program assumes that the attendees of the masquerade--themselves masked like the minstrels--will be privileged enough to be familiar with the Bal Masque, classically educated enough to read Greek, but also enjoy a good minstrel show.

In fact, the 1895 Mardi Gras program is not the only document in the Georgetown archives to include passages both about blackface performance or in pejorative dialect as well as in Latin and Greek. For the first example of such a document we have to return to the year 1867 and the performance of a student minstrel troupe who called themselves the Bononians.

The four page program from the Bononians’ inaugural performance on May 21, 1867 details the show but it almost resembles a modern “zine” more closely than a traditional theatrical program. It brims with jokes, puns, lyrics to original songs, pejorative poems, and includes a lengthy foreword that introduces the Bononians to the world. The sheer verbosity of the document is startling. That verbosity extends across language, from classical language to the

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349 “Mardi Gras 1895: Banquet, Dramatic Entertainment, and Bal Masque.”


racist jargon of contemporary blackface performance: the program includes a version of the ancient Christian hymn “Stabat Mater” and a quotation of Horace, both in Latin, as well as student-written jokes and dialogues in pejorative dialect. Like the creators of the Mardi Gras program, the Bononians assume that their Georgetown audience will be familiar with and comprehend both.

Their very name demonstrates the synthesis of--or perhaps absence of distinction between--the highbrow and the lowbrow at Georgetown. In a sort of preface to the show, the Bononians introduce themselves and humorously explain the origin of their unusual name. The preface reads:

“‘But why are you called the Bononians?’ Well, dear friend, various are the opinions on that point. As on many other topics of equal importance the learned world is divided. Some maintain that our title is derived from Bolonia, the ancient name of Bologna...some declare that it refers to Bones, the presiding genius; others as firmly claim that it is a corruption of Booneonians, in allusion to Daniel Boone, who loved the dark simplicity of the west; while some there be who will have nothing short of a classical derivation averring that it is bonus unio of Tertullian, and the Naturalist Pliny.”

Here, the Bononians make reference both to classical Bologna--close to the seat of Western civilization and the Catholic church--as well as to the Bones, the African percussion instrument appropriated by the minstrel whose name alludes to both the savagery as well as the sexual lasciviousness for which minstrel show condemned its imagined black characters. The Bononians trace their own origins simultaneously to the heroes of classical Christian history, like

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352 See Image Appendix, Image 11.4 for the text of “Stabat Mater” and an original pejorative dialogue directly below it.
354 Ibid.
355 For a discussion of homoeroticism and the symbolic fixation on the black phallus in minstrel material see: Lott, Love and Theft. 53-54.
Tertullian, the ancient Carthaginian Christian thinker, and those of American folk culture, like David Boone.

Historians have documented the influence of frontier folklore--like the stories of Daniel Boone--on the development of minstrelsy. But they have used the evidence of folk symbols’ influence to identify blackface minstrelsy with class and cultural affiliations of the popular or folk, affiliations framed as at odds with highbrow material. And yet, the Bononians reference such highbrow material in the same breath as the elements of folk culture.

To write this program, the Bononians plumbed the depths of their cultural knowledge. Their references stretch across time and place, displaying a gross enthusiasm that the student minstrels had for their material. The program explodes with energy: the front page alone includes fourteen separate sections in eight different fonts. An inscription on the front page reads: “Down the dear, dusky line, teeth gleam and eyeballs shine.” The line literally refers to the way that white teeth and eye-whites contrasted the skin of performers when they went “down the dear, dusky line,” meaning when they blacked-up with the dark make-up of greasepaint or burnt cork. Yet the line--with its overwrought alliteration on the letter “d”--betrays a true passion for minstrelsy. As we have seen over a nearly century long history of minstrel shows at Georgetown, students did indeed hold minstrelsy “dear.” It was a beloved practice.

356 Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America, 40-42.
358 Ibid.
Conclusion

Masked: Things In The Past Aren’t As They Seem

When I submitted a proposal to research and write about the history of blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown in the Spring of 2018, I did not foresee the prescience of my topic to come. In February 2019, the uncovering of Virginia Governor Ralph Northam’s medical school yearbook page--that included a photo of a man, be it Northam or not, wearing blackface--catapulted blackface minstrelsy into the news.\textsuperscript{359} This story said to me that my research into the history of blackface minstrelsy at Georgetown University is probably comparable to the history of the theater form at other colleges. The moment demonstrated enduring trends: both that legitimate blackface performance still exists in the country and, worse yet, that there are still no consequences for it.\textsuperscript{360} If nothing else, it brought the fascinating history of blackface minstrelsy into national conversation and acknowledged its existence in an elite space.

\textsuperscript{359} If Northam is one of the two men in the photograph, as is logically assumed, then he is either wearing blackface or a Klan costume. The first option means that in 1984, Northam chose to parody African Americans by taking up the conventions of the oldest form of cultural domination in the country’s history. The second option means that he wore the uniform of the most vicious racial terrorist organization in the country’s history. Neither choice bodes well for his judgement, let alone his ability to empathize cross-racially. To those who excuse the practice as acceptable for the time, I resubmit the words of Frederick Douglass who, like other African Americans, saw minstrelsy for the racist reverie it was: “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.” For the full story see: John Eligon, “Yearbook Pages at Northam’s Medical School Recorded Both Memories and Prejudices,” \textit{The New York Times}, February 7, 2019, sec. U.S., \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/us/northam-yearbook.html}.

\textsuperscript{360} As of the publication of this thesis, Northam remains in office. However, Megyn Kelly lost her job at NBC after defending blackface on the morning program \textit{Today}. Though Northam and Kelly’s jobs depend on different factors--Northam’s job security is decided by the political whims of his legislature while Kelly’s by network executives attempting to meet the whims of their consumer-viewers--it upsets me that the standard for a white woman speaking on television is higher than that for a white man running a state. For more on Megyn Kelly see: “Megyn Kelly Out At NBC’s ‘Today’ Show,” NPR.org, accessed May 6, 2019, \url{https://www.npr.org/2018/10/25/660644000/megyn-kelly-out-at-nbc-after-blackface-remarks}. 
Of course, I shouldn’t have foreseen this. If there is any lesson I can take from this thesis--perhaps from the doing of history in general--it is to never blindly trust one’s expectations.

Given current cultural presumptions and the existing historiography, I reasonably did not expect that Georgetown students ever put on minstrel shows. If they did, I figured it was a form of “slumming it”--privileged Georgetown boys playing at an exoticized working class identity, an experiment in easy bohemianism on campus. I was wrong. Students--and faculty and administrators and alumni!--loved blackface minstrelsy. They performed in blackface frequently, and always at the most important times of year, for nearly a century. They published glowing reviews of those performances. Unsatisfied with an existing canon of minstrel material, Hoyas penned their own songs, poems, plays, and comic dialogues in pejorative dialect.

Hopefully, this thesis makes a compelling case for the value of art history. Investigating this theater practice reveals deep nuances in the racial feeling on campus that analysis of university policy or demographics of the student body could never reveal. Songs, jokes, and theater primarily inspire emotion and--when we are lucky enough to access them--represent fantastic sources for trying to understand what it was to live in another era.

Indeed, there was no lack of documentary evidence. Living in a culture where authorities generously rewarded oratory prowess, the young men of Georgetown did not mince words. Absent from this thesis however are the perspectives of African Americans themselves--the

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361 Lott actually frames blackface minstrels as the progenitors of American bohemianism. See: Lott, *Love and Theft*. 50-51. Having read Sam Zarroff’s thesis “A Moment in the Sun: Music, Culture, and the Rise and Fall of the Haight Ashbury Counterculture,” I think there is a serious project to be done investigating the connections between the appropriative and cultural strategies shared between the nineteenth century white folk culture that was blackface minstrelsy and the twentieth century white folk culture that was rock’n’roll and the hippie movement. W. T. Lhamon, Jr.’s work on minstrelsy and youth culture is a good starting point for this research. See: Lhamon, Jr., “Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice.”
object of the minstrel show’s derision and fetishization. Fantastic studies do exist on African American perspectives and relationships to blackface minstrelsy. These studies elevate black people in the past from the position of object as they are in the minstrel show to the status of subject. It’s not that African Americans weren’t around on campus during the period about which I write: although Georgetown College did not admit a black student until Harry Thomas Campbell in 1962 or hire black faculty members until the early 1970s, there had always been a sizable number of African Americans on campus working (23% of the workforce in the mid-twentieth century) maintenance, clerical, housekeeping, and hospital aide jobs. And before African Americans worked for wages at Georgetown, the Maryland Jesuits put to work those black people they kept in bondage. At the university, enslaved African Americans labored as artisans, cooks, and laundresses from the university’s founding until even after the Jesuits sold their own slaves in 1838. But the University Archives contain no periodicals, no playbills, no songs or poems that express their views, especially on blackface minstrelsy.

All that said, it is fascinating to me how much time and energy the members of an exclusively white student body spent fantasizing about, writing about, and portraying blackness. Perhaps it is better framed this way: that the only black identity sanctioned on campus--and allowed into the documentary record--for a century was a counterfeit one. Still, as we have seen,

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white Georgetown students blacked up for reasons much more complicated than simply a desire to deride and dominate—although that was certainly part of the disturbing fun. Hoyas expressed political opinions, tried to shore up their own identities as white Americans, expressed inexpressible sentiments, indulged disorder, and marked their year via blackface. We see how important ideas about race were to the life and identity of an exclusively white community—worth remembering, given that historians have only recently turned the framework of race onto non-minority communities.  

One nuance that could not enter the conversation about Gov. Ralph Northam’s appearance in blackface was the white attraction to blackness that accompanies the minstrel’s drive to dominate. Historians were at pains to prove to the general public, while they had their attention, why blackface minstrelsy is offensive and inaccurate at all: that is, to show how blackface minstrelsy is in fact an artifact of white culture, a white, derogatory imagining of what it means to be black that black people—especially black performers—have been saddled with for centuries. Thus, historians could not risk introducing the complexities of racial feelings that minstrelsy expressed. Even Lott, whose book *Love and Theft* foregrounds this tension between

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365 This historiographic movement is referred to as “whiteness studies.” The landmark studies here are: Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Verso, 1990). I dealt with Saxton considerably in this thesis. And: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, NY: Verso, 1991). These works still focus on white identity amongst the working class and working class whites’ relationship with regards to their whiteness to enslaved and then working people of color. Lott fits into this approach as he explores the lost opportunity for an interracial, anti-slavery alliance that minstrelsy, he argues, flirted with.


367 Lott writes on page 17 of *Love and Theft*: “Blackface minstrelsy’s century-long regulation of black cultural practices stalled the development of African American public arts and generated an enduring narrative of racist ideology, a historical process by which an entire people has been made the bearer of another people’s ‘folk’ culture.”
racial antipathy and desire, stuck to the “theft” aspect of minstrelsy when interviewed on national television.  

But the tensions exist in the documentary record at Georgetown. How else can one explain these surprising lines from a student written minstrel song--actually another song written to commemorate Christmas on campus--published in December 1902: “In de dark night, still an' lonely, Brack an’ white am same tow Him [God]; He can't see a bit ob diffrunce 'Twix' Marse Tom an' lill' Jim.” Historians and the general public must try their best to take seriously the contradictions of American culture with regards to race.

Studying blackface minstrelsy allows students of history to do just that. That the university established a working group on the history of slavery at Georgetown and not a practice like blackface minstrelsy bothers me not at all. As Americans, we have yet to reconcile with historical realities, like racialized human bondage, orders of magnitude more heinous than blackface minstrelsy. In other words, we have bigger fish to fry. And yet, I think minstrelsy is worthy of academic attention because of its less egregious nature. It suggests another kind of American racism that is also insidious; an American racism that gave its participants and enthusiasts--through time and across class--distinct pleasure.

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368 The closest Lott came in his CBS Sunday Morning interview to acknowledging the “love” aspect of this is, “I think it is too easy to dismiss the history of blackface as that racist stuff and [say] most of us are better than that. I don’t think most of us are better than that. We are that.” See: CBS Sunday Morning, Blackface: A Cultural History of a Racist Art Form, accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqlD-eZm1ck.


Image Appendix


1.1

1.2
First Performance of the “Contrabands” of Georgetown College.

Tuesday Evening, December 15, 1861, at 7 o'clock.

Overture, - - - - - Troupe.
Opening Chorus (Operatic), - - - "
Fare-thee-well, Kitty Dear, - - F. H. Gerdes.
Old Grey Mare, - - - - J. P. McElroy.
Off for Baltimore, - - - - J. F. Mathews.
'Way down South, - - - - H. C. Williamson.
Old Folks are Gone, - - - - C. Hein.
Darling Rosabel, - - - - J. Jones.
Anvil Chorus, - - - - Company.

Part II.
Hiring an Actor, - - Gerdes and McElroy.
Quartette for violin, guitar, and flutes, “Agathe,” JONES, HEIN, MAJOR, and Mathews.
Old Bob Ridley, - - - - McElroy.
Stocks up, and Stocks down, - Closs and Williamson.
Dat's what's de matter, - - - - Gerdes.
Burlesque Grinders, - - - - Company.
Banjo Solo, - - - - - Hein.

Intermission for Change of Dress.
PART III.

GIMLET,
DUNCE OF PENMARK.

Fuñiman, King of Trumps, - - - C. T. Closs.

Gimlet, Dunce of Penmark, a green young man, addicted to black eyes, blue devils and blue ruin, and who “hasn’t nary red,” - - - J. P. McEloy.

Leatherlungs, the royal favorite harrow-tone; a specimen of Young America, bound for Nicaragua, - - - F. H. Gerdes.

Voracio, Rosinosi, 

{ Chums-in-Chief to 

Raggedstern, } the Dunce, 

{ J. F. Mathews, 

J. Jones. 

Count Dandini, a “demition swell, you know,” - H. Major.

Ghost, - - - - - - - - - C. Hein.

Courtiers, Gymnasts, Dancers, Supes, &c., by the Corps de Ballet.

The entire piece, including songs, choruses, dances, tableaux, &c., written, stolen, and arranged with rhyme and without reason, by a gentleman of well-known abilities, A. Steele Penne, Esq.
Rollicking Revelry

This year a new baby was born on the campus. The new arrival was heralded amid shouts of approval, for it represented Georgetown's first grand-scale attempt at musical comedy and satire in a combination that elicited a great deal of amusement and comment.

The show, written, produced, and acted by members of the student body, was directed by Ben Zintak, and summoned to its aid the resources not only of the Mask and Bauble but of other extra-curricular organizations as well.

The performance itself began as an old-time minstrel show, consisting of a dapper interlocutor, Robert Napier, surrounded by numerous dark complexioned gentlemen, who readily snapped back the answers to his interrogations. As a matter of fact, it was rumored that the cast has pooled their point coupons in order to get sufficient corn for this colored quiz show. The chorus of fifty voices with their renditions of old negro spirituals and modern favorites was exceptionally well received. Brian Murphy, popular prefect, laid aside his scapul and stethoscope long enough to take the podium and direct the choristers. Jim O'Rourke, another medical student favored the gathering with several tenor solos, while two select quartets offered intriguing close harmony.
Image 6: “Georgetown University Minstrels and Comedy for Benefit of Poughkeepsie Crew Fund: Belasco Theatre,” May 7, 1910, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives.
W. L. Byrne
Manager Boat Club
Image 10: “‘Ye Olde Hoya Minstrels’ Program,” 1948, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives.
CAST

John Finnegan

Jerry McGettigan
Bill Daly
Chuck Laiosa
Ed Dougherty
Frank Jones
Jack Farrell

Emperor Francis "Ephus" Jones
Charles "Nosepulver" Laiosa
John "Fingers" Farrell
Gerd "Boltmose" McGettigan

Miss Galagher
Farrell and McGettigan
Matthew Troy
Bob Priestly
Ed Korney
Norman Kenyon
Walter Schubert
Dave Stickleberg
Jerry Kane
Billy Conn
Steve Rogers
John Berger
Tom Graham
Tom Dolan

CHORUS

T. Humphrey
R. Hurley
G. Srivickland
J. Foley
G. Melvin
A. Pallotta
Wm. Reilly
G. Tower
G. Vickery
R. Watson
J. Watson
T. Woltering
A. Ziepolo
T. Romeo
J. O'Conner
G. LeBlanc
W. Maloney
J. Pyne
Hugh O'Rourke
Eugene Cooke

Jerry McGettigan
Frank Jones
Bill Daly
Fred Cornetta
Geo. Nestlerode
Bob Colby
John Edsel
Lou Bancheri

Dance Director
Musical Director
Continuity
Stage Crew
The MASK and BAUBLE presents...

**BROTHER ORCHID — APRIL 16, 17, 18**

**MINSTREL REVUE — APRIL 30, MAY 1 & 2**

**ANTIGONE — MAY 14, 15, 16**

---

**All plays on weekends**

---

3 dates for $4.00 on special student subscription tickets.

2 tickets for every AA stub

$2.00 per ticket

Anyone admitted on subscription ticket

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### REGULAR RATE

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**Total** $3.90

Total for all three
THE BONONIAN MINSTREL.
Small Boys’ Side, Georgetown College.

SOIREE D’AFRIQUE.
ENTERTAINMENT OF THE
Bononian Minstrels,
Tuesday, May 21,
1867.
Down the deep, dewy lane,
Trot, glum and crystal flow.
(Cho. in Bon’s Poems)

Stage Manager – Frank Cunningham

PROGRAMME.

Prologue...........JOSEPH E. WASHINGTON
Overture .......................COMPANY
Minstr’s Song...........WILLIE REILLY
Nicodemus .................P. C. JAMES
Ring, ring the Banjo............RICHARD BAKER
I’m lonely since my mother died...JOHN DREW
Peter Gray ..................P. C. JAMES
Enoch Arden’s farewell........JOHN DREW
Tending to-night........JAMES V. COLEMAN
Meet me at the lane........JOHN DREW

QUASH.
Dr. Squibb, a Quack...JOSEPH E. WASHINGTON
Quash, his pungent servant.....P. C. JAMES
Heary, a love-sick patient......JOH. S. EDWARDS
Mr. Fitzsimmons, his father...CHAS. CAUGHEY
Dampler, a Yankee of 1 SAM. SCALES
Nourishing humor, 2 SAM. SCALES
Spouting, a lymphatic wight.....C. REUPPIER

FANCY CLOG MEDLEY
By the celebrated........A. J. McNICKLE

The Actors ...............[FRANK JOHNSON]
.............................[GEORGE DAVIS]

THE MISCHIEVOUS NICCER
Antony, the mischievous nigger...P. C. JAMES
Jimmy Ducks, an Irishman......SAM. SCALES
M. Primo, a Frenchman.........J. V. COLEMAN
Colonel Flutter, brother of Widow Morton, 1 WILL BRENNER
Joe, Mrs. Morton’s cousin.......JOE EDWARDS

CINCBLE, OR THE MUMMY
Ginger Blue..................GEORGE DAVIS
Capt. Rife ..................CHARLES M. CAUGHEY
Dr. Galen, who has discovered WILL BRENNER
the elixir of life, 2 CHARLES A. BALL
Charles, a portrait painter.....JOE EDWARDS
Wille.........................CHARLES A. BALL
O’Leary......................JAMES COLEMAN
Patent.......................CHARLES REUPPIER
Schoolmaster................SAMUEL SCALES

The whole performance will be interspersed
with Songs and Fancy Dances by different mem-
bers of the Club.

We think it due to the young gentle-
man who impersonates Jimmy Ducks, to
state that this character was given him at a
very late hour, the original performer
being taken suddenly ill. We know our
good friends will be mindful of this, and
be lenient in their judgments.

We take this opportunity of expressing
our thankfulness to Messrs. Reilly, Elliot,
Kieckhofer, and Seals, for their invaluable
aid in the musical department. With gen-
tlemanly grace they have always lent their
services whenever called on to assist.
THE BONONIAN MINSTREL.

GEORGETOWN COLLEGE, D. C.

OUR POSITION.

As this is the first time that the Bononian Minstrels make their bow to a public audience, they deem it proper to say something concerning their organization, its origin and purpose. Our little club was started on its career of mirth, a few years ago, by a band of light-hearted, rollicking lads of the Small Boys' Side. The sole object of its commencement was an evening's frolic. This end, which gave it life, continued it in existence. We aim not at lofty outbursts of tragic eloquence, affecting scenes of mimic sorrow, or caustic satire on public faults. Ours the simple role to amuse—to create a tiny oasis in the monotony of our daily life, where sweet shrubs of memory may afterwards bloom and cluster, when the hands that planted them are feeble and dispersed. "Bene est desipere in loco," said the acute Horace, and we feel sure that the merry old Roman would find no fault with us to-day. "But why are you called Bononians?" Well, dear friend, various are the opinions on that point. As on many other topics of equal importance, the learned world is divided. Some maintain that our title is derived from Bononia, the ancient name of Bologna, the residence of one of our first members; some declare that it refers to Bones, the presiding genius; others as firmly claim that it is a corruption of Booneonians, in allusion to Daniel Boone, who loved the dark simplicity of the West; while some there be, who will have nothing short of a classical derivation, affering that it is the bonus unio of Tertullian, and the Naturalist Pliny. But be that as it may, suffice it to know that we cherish the old name as an heirloom, and leave to our scholarly brothers, the large boys, all further elucidation of the subject. Perhaps some distant Bononian may smile at the ignorance of his present brethren in this grave matter. Should he be better informed, we beg him to enlighten his sable comrades. With this declaration of the rise and humble scope of our little society, we commend ourselves, fair audience, to your kind indulgence.

The Bononian Minstrels of 1866-7.

We are indebted to the Philharmonic Society of the College for its Brass Band, on the present occasion. Although but a short time in existence, they have rapidly progressed in their particular line, and added greatly to the pleasure of some of our entertainments.

An interesting game of Base-ball between the Nationals and the Georgetown College Club was played, last Tuesday, on the grounds of the White House. Although this is the first time the Students have suffered defeat, still they are not discouraged, seeing it is from the hands of some of the best players in the country. We understand the College boys intend to try their powers again, after the June examinations. Their score was above that of the University of Virginia Club, and the Nautical of Annapolis, in their games with the Nationals.

"Lord bless my soul," exclaimed Mrs. Partington, when she saw Ike blacked up for the Bononian entertainment, "I believe the day of judgment is really coming. The Bible says, 'there will be darkness on the face of the sun,' and there is my son's face as black as can be."
MONODY ON HASH.*

I.

There is not in this wide world a viand so sweet,
As the hash that's concocted of all sorts of meat.
Oh! the comb with its honey 'll be bitter and tart,
Ere the taste of that hash from my mouth shall depart.

II.

Yet it was not that *Dorks* had spread o'er the dish,
The sauces of Soyer, or lobster or fish;
'Twas not the vile gravy we every day swill.
Oh! no, it was something more exquisite still.

III.

'Twas onions, delight of my stomach, I found
In plentiful abundance were swimming around.
And I felt how the best kind of hash may improve,
When to onions is added a taste of the clove.

IV.

Sweet hash of old Georgetown! how calm could I rest,
With a dose of that mixture inside of my vest.
No nightmare-approaches disturbing one's peace,
As after a supper of canvas-back geese.

V.

The Romans might boast of their nightingale brains,
And tongues of the peacock, and gizzards of cranes;
The Chinese may gobble their rats and their mice,
And imagine these vermin exceedingly nice.

VI.

The Dutchman may swallow his lager and kraft,
The Russian his candle, quite pleasant no doubt,
But in my estimation such tins-bits are trash,
When compared with a dishfull of onions and hash.

Our friend Sambo was out on the sidewalk looking at the veterans parading; all at once he cried out, "Hurrah for the girls of '76." "Oh, go long," said Pompey, "that's too old; hurrah for the girls of 18!"

*Hash—a sine qua non of the College breakfast table.

Well, Pete, you say the object of the Minstrels is fun; now can you tell me the effects of fun on the system? Well, Bones, as near as I can come to it, it is as follows:—

Mirth is the medicine of life,
It cures its ills, it calms its strife;
It softly smooths the brow of care,
And writes a thousand graces there.

A FUN-Y GEM.

The "Brewers" should to "Maltia" go,
The "Boohlers" all to "Scilly;"
The "Queehers" to the "Friendly Isles,"
The "Partiers" to "Ottum."—

The little, snarling, caroling babes,
That break our slighted rest,
Should be packed off to "Babylon,"
To "Loo-land," or to "Brest."

From "Spat-head" cooks go o'er to "Greece;"
And while the "Miser" whals,
His passage to the "Guinea" coasts,
"Spendthrifts" are in the "Streits;"
"Spinakers" should to the "Neddis" go,
"Wine-bibbers" to "Cebry."—
"Gourmands" should lunch at "Sandwich Isles;"
"Wags" at the bay of "Fundy;"
"Bachelors" to the "United States;"
"Maidis" to the "Isle of Man."
Let "Gardeners" go to "Botany Bay;"—
And "Shee-blacks" to "Japan."
Thus emigrate—and misplaced men
Will then no longer vex us;
And all who aint provided for,
Had better go to Texas.

William Henry, Bones' brother, having made up his mind to marry Miss Anna Bread, became poetical, and got off the following:—

While belles their lovely graces speak,
And tops around 'em flutter,
I'll be content with Anna Bread,
And won't have an y but her.

"And won't have any butter!" added Bones. "Golly, you ought to have lived in the time of Lot's wife, for the Bible says that then all but her fled."

Well, Handy Andy, what sort of potatoes are you planting? Raw ones to be sure, yer honor, would ye have me bile them?
TOBACCO--SMOKING SPIRITUALIZED.

Tobacco's but an Indian weed,
Grows green at morn, cut down at eve,
Shorn our decay—
We are but clay,
Think on this when you smoke tobacco.

The pipe that is so lilly white,
Wherein so many take delight,
Is broke with a touch.
Our life is but such.
Think of this, when you smoke tobacco.

The pipe that is no soul within,
Shows that man's life is stained with sin.
It doth require
To be purged with fire.
Think of this, when you smoke tobacco.

The smoke that doth ascend so high,
Proves that man's life is vanity.
'Tis gone with a puff;
Our life is but such.
Think of this, when you smoke tobacco.

The ashes that are left behind,
Do serve to put us all in mind,
That gone dust,
Return we must.
Think of this, when you smoke tobacco.

The following beautiful song was sung before the Queen by a Chinese lady, a short time ago. If you will have a little patience, and study for a moment, you will be able to speak broken China as it now stands:

Oh e meto la te anho pwt hne,
Anib uya po hndo fhbe st,
'Twilpr ovem osten cllent ent,
Hag uu llt yilki hh tte st.

Taol nft osh hll lgs apz uln,
Soc omet oth cama rian dtyr,
Nob eterc azcl sewh ercb efoad,
Orz hata nother needb uy.

"Blessed is he who is afraid of thunder," says our friend Dampley, "for he will hesitate about getting married."

"Yes," subjoins Ginger, with unpleasant recollections of the past, "blessed also am de orphans, kase dcy hab no mudders to spank 'em."

NAELIA GEORGII CUYLERII.

Stabat Cuyler dolorous,
Tota nocte lacrymosus,
Dum discebat logicam.

Timor juvenis dolentis,
Consistatis et gemens,
Oppimebat animem.

Oh! quam tristis et afflicta
Illa thesis benedicta,
Quae vexabat Georgium.

Qui moerabat et dolebat
Dum habere se videbat
Immortalem Spiritum.

Quis est homo qui non fleret
Georgium Cuyler cum videret
In tantum supplicio?

Vere lacrymis defenda,
Lactu fuit et gemenda
Georgii condition.

Pro peccatis suse menas
Vidit datum se tormentas,
Et moerori subita.

Vidit se jam condemnatum,
Et diploma consciatris,
Et pudori dedicat.

Eja vos patres doctores,
Cum sint omnes peccatores,
Parcite Georgio.

Rogae fane imponatis,
Et diploma consciatris
Juveni Cuylerio.

A young lady at a party was asked by one of the Students if she had seen Crabbe's Tales. "Why no," she answered, "I did not know crabs had tails." "I beg your pardon, Miss," said he, "I mean have you read Crabbe's Tales?" "And I assure you, sir," said she, "I did not know that red crabs, or any other crabs had tails."

Quash, through the medium of our little journal, advertises for the following:--

"Wanted—De hat dat had'n had a nap for two weeks; also de condition in which it fell."
Image 12: Georgetown University Dramatic Association, “Thanksgiving Eve at Georgetown College” 1885, Dramatic Association Archive, Georgetown University Archives.
ΤΟ ΤΟΥ ΔΕΙΠΝΟΥ ΠΙΝΑΚΙΟΝ.

Οστρέα ἐν ἰμιοστράχοις.
Ταριχεύτα.
Μελεαγρίδες οστρέοι ὀνθυλευμέναι
σὺν ὅψι ἐκασιθίνῳ.
Νεόπεττα οστρέα.
Πτέρνα καὶ γλώττα ψυχρά.

Μῆλα τῆς γῆς.
Στάχνες.
Μῆλα τῆς Κύπριδος.
Πίσοι χλωροί.

Γάλα χρυσαμπυλής. Πέμματα παντοδαπὰ.
Μηλίτης οἶνος. Ἁρτόχρεως.

Ἀσταφίδες. Ἰσχάδες. Κάρινα.
Κριθανίτιοι γαλαχτοδόχοι.
Πλαχοῦντες ἀλμυροὶ. Τύρος.
Κοφφά Ἀραβική. Λίθαλωτέα.
The Play.

"A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the best of men."—OLD SONG.

 Minstrels...

I.

Bones:    Tambos:
TOM DUFFY.  JOE KEANE.
FELIX SMITH.  NED BRADY.

Interlocutor:
DICK DOUGLAS.

Smackum Septette:

TOM FINNING,  { First Tenor.
HOW. HARRINGTON,

JOSLYN FINKE,  { Second Tenor.
HARRY GOWER,

GUS GAYNOR,
JACK FOGARTY,
FRANK SLATTERY,

Soloist ........................................... PAT SCANLAN
Danseur Eccentricque .................. ED MCMANUS
Musical Director ................. JOHANNUS AUGUST VON FOGARTY
Accompanist ............................ CHARLIE MULLAN

II.

Monologue .................................. CHARLIE GREEN
Highfalutin' Hibernianisms .......... { GUS GAYNOR
                                      { ED MCMANUS
Ethiopian Eccentricities ............. { JOE KEANE
                                      { CHARLIE GREEN

III.

...Afterpiece...

GEORGETOWN vs. KENDALL GREEN,
by JIM WILLIAMS and A. DUMMY.
Ball Masque.

"Sometimes I fear, when glad occasion sits,
And mask in mirth, like to a comedy." — SPENCER.

I. GRAND MARCH — Faust
   "To breathe the enlivening spirit and to see
   The generous purpose in the glowing breast." — THOMSON.

II. TWO-STEP — The Directory
   "At the twelvemonth's end, I'll change my black gown for a faithful friend." — LOVE'S LABOR LOST.

III. LANCIERS — Fun and Frolic
   "If the tongue
   Dropt manna and could make the worse appear
   The better reason." — MILTON.

IV. WALTZ — Princess Bonnie
   "Lend me the flourish of all gentle tongues,
   I've painted rhetoric." — LOVE'S LABOR LOST.

V. POLKA — Jolly Students
   "I have better news in store for you
   Than you expect." — MERCHANT OF VENICE.

VI. TWO-STEP — Chronicle-Telegraph
   "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet are in imagination all compact." — MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

VII. WALTZ — Robin Hood
   "Now luck for us and a kind, hearty bit.
   For he who pleases never falls out of wit." — DRYDEN.

... UNMASK ... 

VIII. TWO-STEP — Manhattan Beach
   "How green and fresh you are in this old world." — KING JOHN.

IX. QUADRILLE — Wang
   "He could on either side dispute,
   Confute, change hands, and still confute." — BUTLER.

X. SCHOTTISCH — The Lily and the Rose
   "Learned without opinion, and strange without heresy." — LOVE'S LABOR LOST.

XI. TWO-STEP — Imperial
   "His hair upraised, his nostrils stretched with struggling." — HENRY VI.

XII. WALTZ — Love's Dreamland
   "Stone walls do not a prison make,
   Nor iron bars a cage." — LOVELACE.

XIII. TWO-STEP — Varmouse
   "Why did my parents send me to the schools that I with knowledge
   might enrich my mind?" — SPENCER.

XIV. VIRGINIA REEL
   "Get money; still get money, boy,
   No matter by what means." — JONSON.

    Home, Sweet Home.

SUPPER.
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Special to THE NEW YORKTIMES. “HEATH DIES YEAR AFTER M’INTYRE: Partner in Famous Minstrel Team Had Been Ill Two Years FIRST JOINT ACT IN 1874 Blackface Pair Last Appeared in ‘America Sings’ in the Early 1930’s at Boston - Biographer Visits Him Bedridden at Partner’s Death Returned to the Footlights Heath Lost a Partner Helped Introduce Ragtime Only Friend ‘Jim’ Remained.” New York Times. 1938.


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