

# BLACKFACE

## In Academia

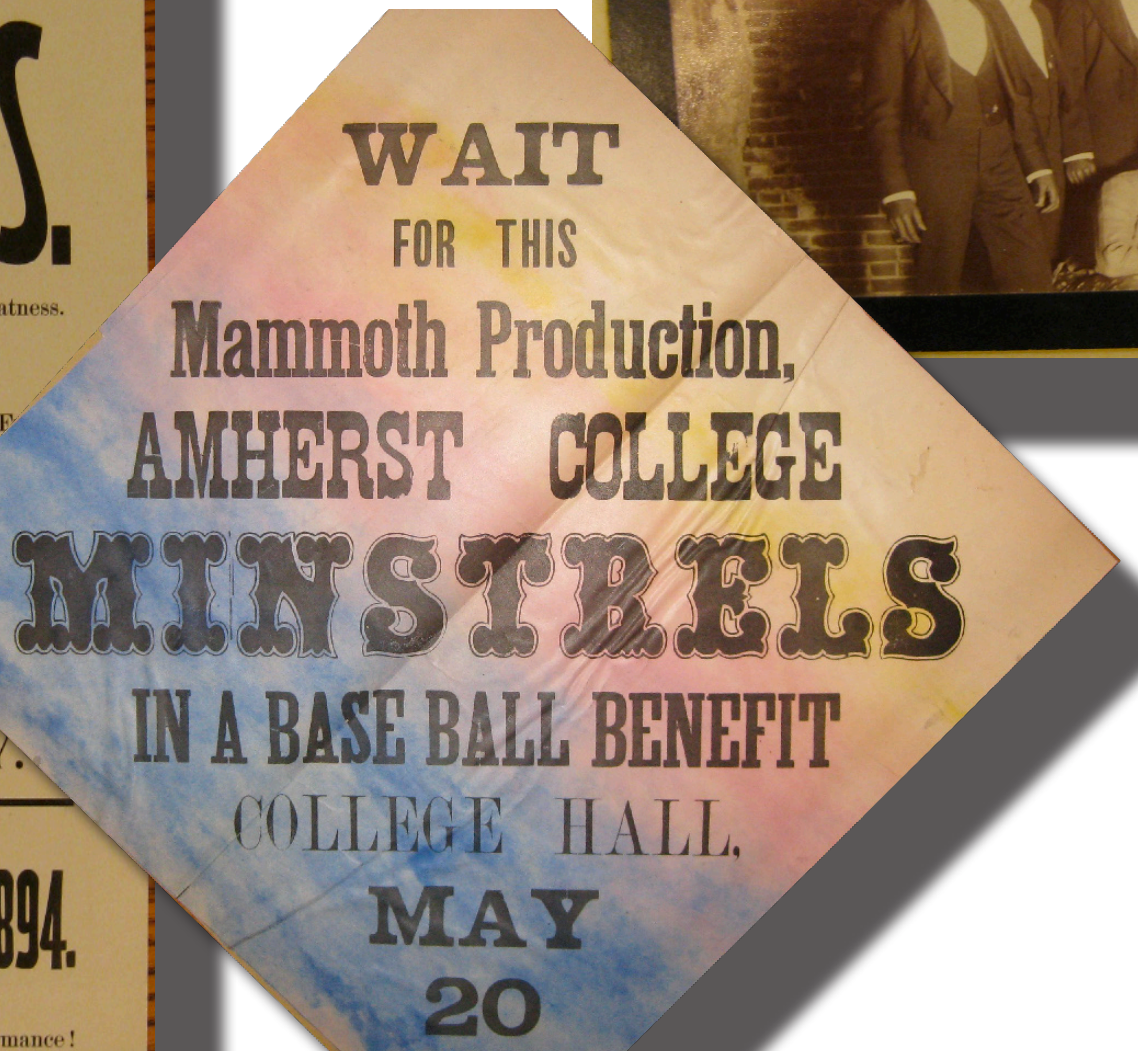
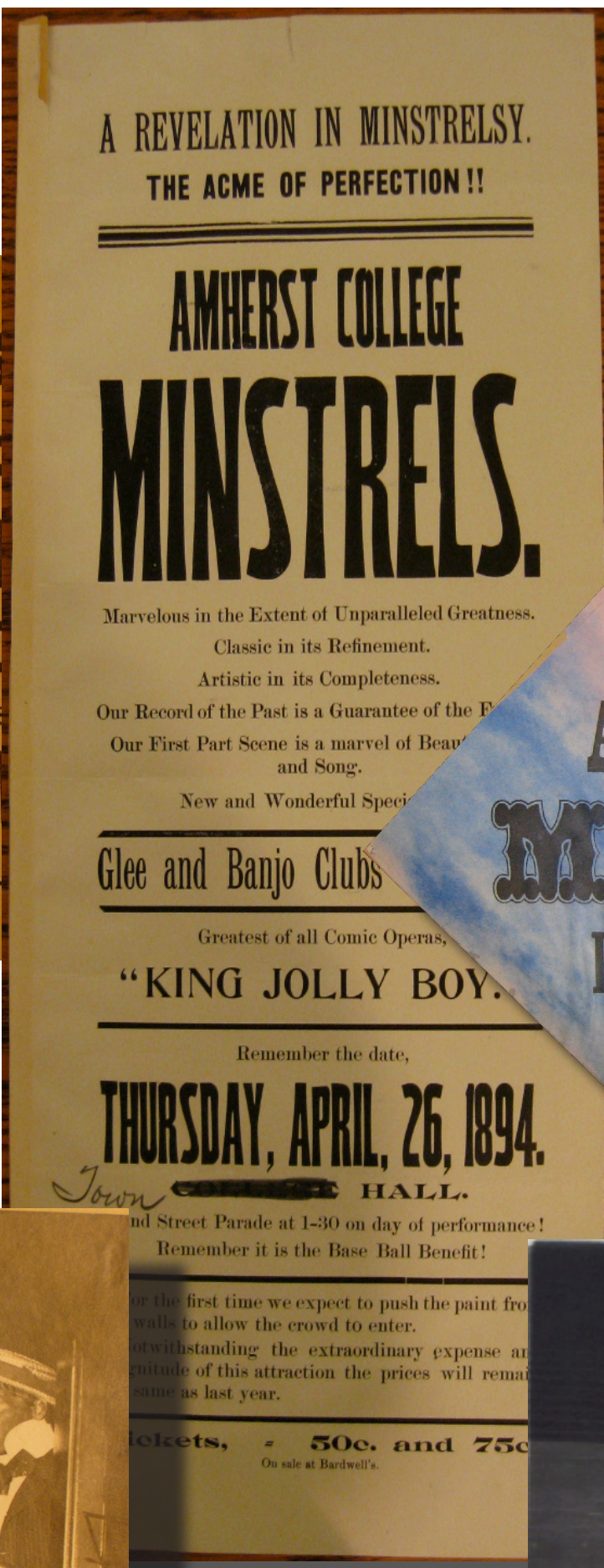
Research Conducted by

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Sponsored by

The Hart Institute for American History

At Amherst



At Brown

My research began as an attempt to acquire greater context for and understanding of an event, the birth of the Alma Mater, which I knew would be of considerable interest to the student body. I received a generous grant from the Hart Institute for American History and traveled between Pomona College, Amherst College, Brown University, Harvard University and Yale University researching and comparing various collegiate minstrel shows and other racially-derived theatrical performances. This poster showcases a small fraction of collected images and information.

Amherst College was perhaps the best-organized archives I visited. In no time I had easily established the existence of minstrel shows. Amherst College had a annually returning minstrel troupe, which sponsored the Baseball team. This particular troupe was only one of several, but is unique for its advertisements, semi-professional attitude, annual standing, parades and for the trains which ran specially to the shows in an effort to find a wider audience. Amherst's archives also seemed to be the most aware of Amherst Minstrelsy.

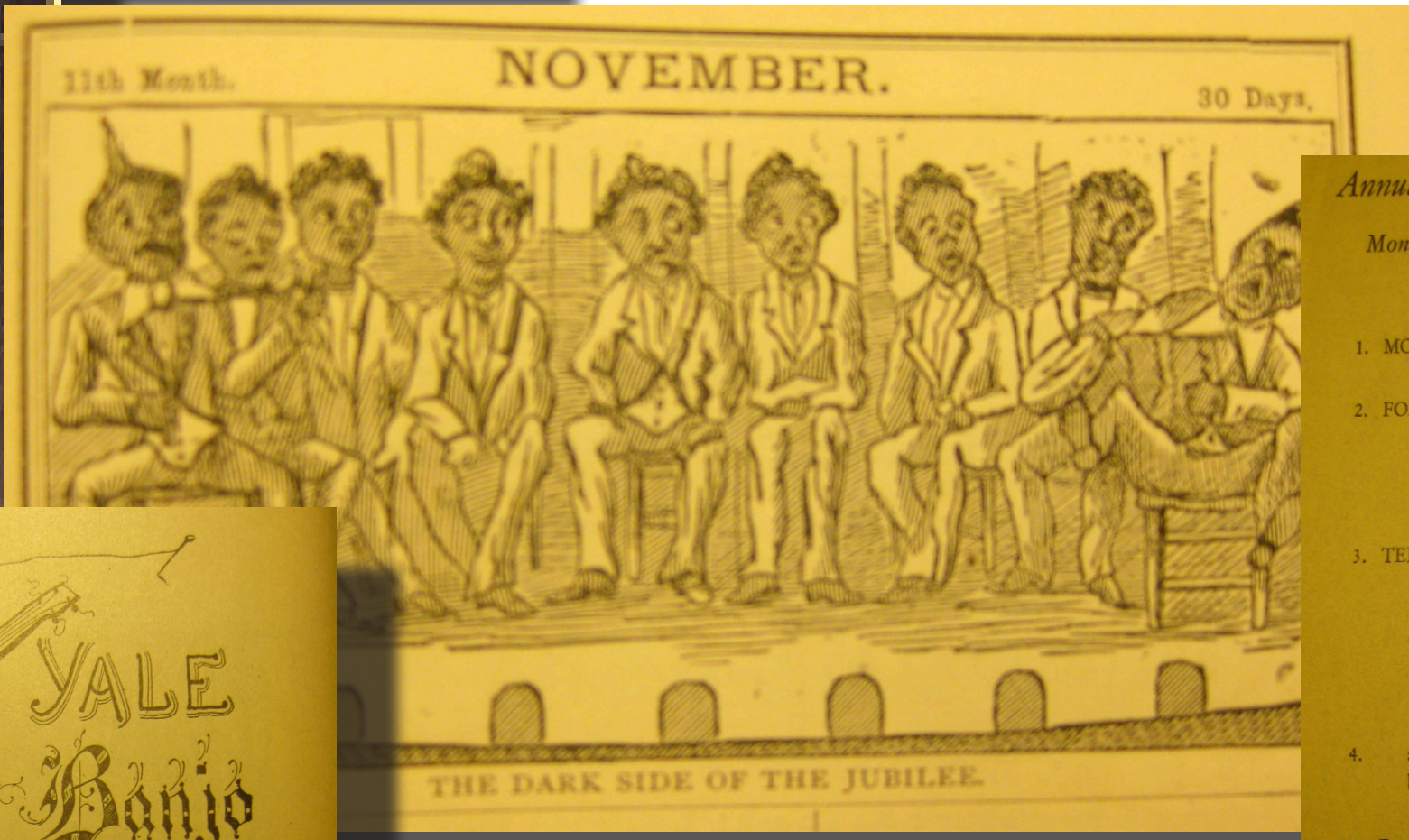
Brown University was both the first and last school I visited in New England. The school routinely had minstrel show benefits and for at least one year had an official minstrel troupe organization listed in the school yearbook, the Liber Brunensis. This group was known as the Brunonian Club and its troupe was listed as traveling throughout the northeast, from St Louis to Chicago to Peoria, etc. A Brown Universities Dramatic Club, Hammer and Tongs, also frequently participated in minstrel shows.

At Pomona

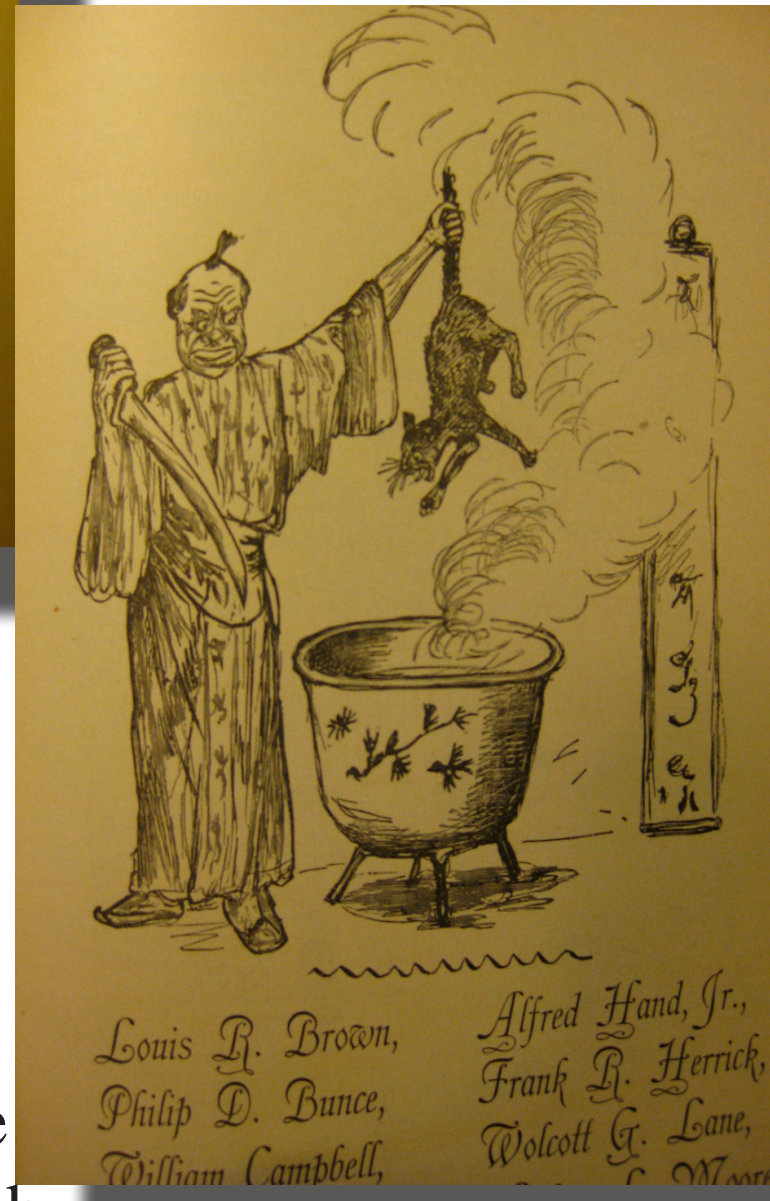


Pomona College was the first school I researched. There were two areas of principal interest: the existence of minstrel shows and their influence on the Alma Mater. As it was my first experience in the project, I was astonished to learn the extent to which blackface performances were present. However, interested parties really need look no further than Lyon's The History of Pomona College 1888-1969, for a simple admittance of the minstrel influence on the Alma Mater. Pomona College's minstrel shows seemed to have occurred later than at other schools and on a smaller scale, which is in line with the school's size and founding.

At Harvard



At Yale



Harvard University's archives are gargantuan. Looking through them for minstrel shows was reminiscent of the proverbial needle in a haystack. However, through records of the oldest American collegiate theater group, the Hasty Pudding Club, I eventually found records of blackface minstrelsy. As at other schools, Harvard minstrel shows mostly appeared as benefits. At Harvard, I found my favorite playbill, one listing Ethiop-Hibernian (Irish/African) Minstrels. Evidently, two caricatures are better than one.

Yale University was extremely difficult to research. At first it seemed as though no records of minstrelsy remained. This seemed out of character. After an initial find of only one benefit show, I had low hopes. Then I discovered the annual Thanksgiving Jubilee, a show the school histories were quick to gloss over. This jubilee was widely despised by the school administration (mostly for rude portrayals of women and faculty members) and eventually cancelled. The Thanksgiving show had an established minstrel show, so much so that nostalgic alumni once recreated the jubilee, complete with minstrels, at a theater in New York City. Also of extreme interest was the discovery of a performance of Pomona College's Torchbearers by the Yale Glee Club. Although it is a symbol of Pomona College's Glee Club championship of 1932 it is also a vivid symbol of Pomona College's contribution to the canon of racially derived college songs.

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