



Photo: Center for American History, UT-Austin

# SECRETS IN THE EYES OF TEXAS

Story by Kaitlyn Wells

**T**he boisterous clatter of the Darrell K Royal - Texas Memorial Stadium suddenly calms in response to the electricity in the air. No one ever seems to know where it starts, but the chorus of school spirit and pride begins to sound.

With the first notes from the Longhorn Band, nearly 100,000 voices join in, as hands rise into the air with the two opposing fingers pointing toward the sky. The combination of a long-loved song, and the iconic Longhorn Band epitomize

and faculty. Johnson, also the program director of the Varsity Minstrel Show, a program that raised funds for the varsity track team, believed the event was the perfect venue for its debut.

Minstrel shows consisted of comedic

May 12, 1903 at the Hancock Opera House on West Sixth Street. Performed by a quartet of blackface students, accompanied by Sinclair on the banjo, it was apparently an immediate hit with the audience. One of the groups singers, J.R.

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much of what it means to be a Longhorn at the University of Texas.

However, the song seems to rub at least some Longhorns the wrong way. T.J. Finley, who graduated from UT with bachelors degree in kinesiology in the Spring of 2008, says he stopped singing UTs iconic alma mater completely after being told the song was first performed by students wearing blackface makeup in a turn-of-the-century minstrel show.

“At first, I was just so shocked that something like this could still exist,” says Finley, now a graduate student at the Duke University School of Law.

Micheondra Williams, College of Liberal Arts sociology major, says she also learned about the alma maters history from a friend, but seems to have a more nuanced opinion: I have to admit that I was a little bit shocked to read about the songs history, she says. But there arent any words that put me down or degrade me, or make me feel negatively about myself or anyone else. I feel if we were to research other things we do, or participate in, we would find many things can be traced back to a time much different than today.

George Sylvie, an associate professor in the School of Journalism, understands from first-hand experience how some African-Americans can be still affected by past intolerances, but feels people should understand the songs history better before putting forth an opinion. Just because the song was performed at a minstrel show, does not make it racist, he says.

Penned in 1903 by John Lang Sinclair, editor of the Cactus Yearbook and a UT band member, The Eyes of Texas was written at the request of band member Lewis Johnson, who played tuba for the Varsity Band (now the Longhorn Band) and directed the University Chorus. Since the University did not have a school song, Johnson wanted Sinclairs help in writing one that would represent the students

skits, dancing, music and variety acts, often performed by white participants covered in black costume makeup to portray plantation slaves. African-American characters were often portrayed as ignorant, lustful and unsympathetic characters. Better known as blackface, the performances first came onto the stage in the late 1820, and became popular in the United States from 1841-1870. They began to lose their popularity after the Civil War, when vaudeville performances began to replace them. Vaudevilles provided a cleaner presentation of variety acts that catered to the new middle class and their urban lifestyles, according to the University of Virginias Web site. In fact, Charlie Chaplin was a former vaudevillian who incorporated vaudevilles physical comedy into his silent films.

Originally, Sinclair wrote the song as a parody to UT President William L. Prather’s signature closing statement at all public events. Before becoming president in 1899, Prather was a student at Washington and Lee University in Virginia. He was greatly enamored by its president, Gen. Robert E. Lee, who often told his students and faculty, The eyes of the South are upon you, according to the Amarillo News-Globe in 1931.

Prather, who seems to have enjoyed the saying so much he incorporated it into his own school addresses, began concluding each speech with: Remember, the eyes of Texas are upon you.

The Eyes of Texas debuted

Jim Cannon, was quoted in the Denison Herald, on Sept. 9, 1931, saying, It was all a joke. We did not know what we were starting.

A variety act gone awry, The Eyes of Texas has had a lasting impression on all University students, no matter the creed.

The original manuscript of The Eyes of Texas is located in the lobby of the Texas Exes Alumni Center. Below are the complete lyrics, sung to the tune of I’ve Been working on the Railroad. The second stanza is traditionally sung at the opening and closing of all major sporting events at the University of Texas.

*I once did know a President,  
A way down South, in Texas.  
And, always, everywhere he went,  
He saw the eyes of Texas.*

*The Eyes of Texas are upon you,  
All the live long day.*

*The Eyes of Texas are upon you,  
You can not get away.*

*Do not think you can escape them  
At night or early in the morn-  
The Eyes of Texas are upon you  
Till Gabriel blows his horn.*

*Sing me a song of Prexy,  
Of days long since gone by.  
Again I seem to greet him  
And hear his kind reply.  
Smiles of gracious welcome  
Before my memory rise,  
Again I hear him say to me,  
Remember Texas Eyes.*

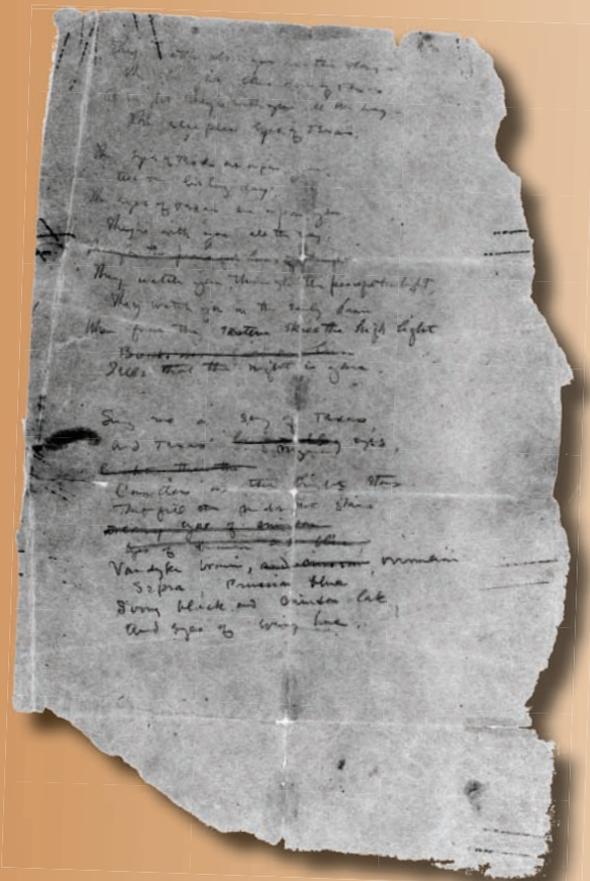


Photo: Center for American History, UT-Austin

tried really hard to keep black students out of the school and out of many aspects of student life.

Although black students were admitted to the University, the policy of institutionalized discrimination was carried on for six more years by only admitting these students when historically black universities, such as Prairie View College and Texas Southern University, did not offer coursework specific to their major, Garner says.

In her thesis, *Identity and Diversity in the Longhorn Band: An Oral History*, Garner says it took approximately a decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling for UT's student activities to become desegregated, and one aspect of student life that remained segregated was the band itself. It wasn't until 1965 that an African-American student could perform as a Longhorn Band member, and 1990 before the University's

first African-American drum major was selected.

Today, John Fleming remains the only African-American chosen as drum major at UT, the highest honor among band members. Fleming was also the only African-American in a leadership position with the Longhorn Band, including all section leaders. "I didn't necessarily champion that title because I didn't want people to turn it into a racial thing, because

when John (Fleming) came out at the first game and some of the people sitting in the stands saw an African-American in a white drum major uniform and a white hat leading the Longhorn band on the field, that triggered all kinds of stuff. Some negative aspects included threatening phone calls and hate mail.

Richter, now the associate director of academic affairs at the Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music in the College of Fine Arts, was quoted in Garner's thesis on the backlash he received from the community for selecting Fleming as drum major: "Particularly on weekends

I'd get some incredibly scary phone calls from people angry for allowing an African-American to become the drum major of the University of Texas Longhorn Band.

It was a lot of hate mail and a lot of hate phone calls. It still told me that the vestiges of racism are out there in our society. They weren't inside. I never believed for one second that it was anybody inside the band. Richter says he never told Fleming about the racist messages he received from the public.

The criticism became so bad, he requested his two young children not answer the phone. However, one evening, his daughter (between 8 and 10-years-old at the time) did answer the phone, and were left in tears by a particularly hateful caller. "I remember where I was sitting and what I was doing," he recalls today. "My daughter was in the kitchen and I asked her to answer the phone. I remember her face.

## **“I didn’t want it to become, ‘well here’s our token black person.’”**

program or law school. It wasn't until 1954 that UT's undergraduate admissions were desegregated, with the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Even with the support of the U.S. Supreme Court, it would be another two years before the University would openly admit black students.

Brette Garner, a 2007 linguistics/Plan II graduate, and Longhorn Band member, wrote her undergraduate thesis about African-Americans in the Longhorn Band. "The University has a great deal of racism in its past," she says. "For a long time, UT

I really felt like I had earned that spot," says Fleming. "I didn't want it to become, well here's our token black person."

Garner quotes Glenn Richter, Longhorn Band director from 1980-'95, as remembering when Fleming first auditioned for drum major: "When he (Fleming) told me he wanted to go up for drum major, I kind of cheered because I thought, this is an important milestone for this band and for this University. It turned out to be a win-win-win situation all the way across the board. The only negative was—and nobody really knew it at time

Richter has long come to terms with Fleming's position within the Longhorn Band. He now says: "I told him that I really believed he really had the talent. I was so impressed with his grace. John was always businesslike in rehearsals, and handled it (the pressure) beautifully. Colt McCoy is considered a coach on the football field, and John was really a director on the [band] field."

Lesley Latham, a biomedical engineering major in the School of Engineering, and former saxophone player for the Longhorn Band, says she

would often joke around with her fellow black band members about the lack of diversity of the players. During band auditions, they would count the number of black applicants against those accepted. We made lots of jokes about it, Latham says. It was really just to ask, were they

of 2008, African-Americans made up 4.4 percent of the entire student population, while Asian Americans accounted for 15.1 percent and Hispanics accounted for 15.9 percent of UTs 49,984 students.

Comparatively, the Longhorn football team had a higher diversity rate in 2008

perception and I respect them for that.

For his part, T.J. Finley says he always respected the opinions of classmates who chose to sing the alma mater. It doesnt bother me if someone doesnt agree. You cant force action on anyone. The most important thing to me is letting people

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cutting black people on purpose. We did it just to see who got cut.

During her freshman year, in the Fall of 2005, Latham remembers eight blacks overall were admitted to the band, and a total of 10 each year during her sophomore and junior years at UT. Band wasn’t much of a race thing, so I never really felt excluded, she says. I actually don’t think that they are purposely trying to keep blacks out of LHB. I think the biggest difference is culture, not race. Not many people try out who are of color. It’s just not what’s hot. When they do I could still see how they could pick 36 other extremely other talented saxophone players [out of 80 applicants].

In the Fall of 2008, the Longhorn Band had 380 members and 10 (2.6 percent) were African-American, slightly more than the 2.4 percent enrolled at the Butler School of Music, according to the Office of Information Management and Analysis. (Asian Americans and Hispanics represented 8.7 percent and 12.9 percent, respectively.)

For the University as a whole, in the Fall

among its players. Of the 119 members, 5 percent are Hispanic, 46 percent are white, and 49 percent are African-American, according to the Student Financial Services office.

Today, the Division for Diversity and Community Engagement office on campus works to build an inclusive UT environment through creating higher diversity integration in teaching, research and campus services, according to its Web site.

John Fleming, now employed on campus at the Center for African and African-American Studies, is well aware of the recent cultural diversification efforts of the University, and their attempts to accommodate the needs of minority students.

Fleming says he understands why students like Finley boycott the song, but doesn’t believe that is the best approach to affect change. Is it really the song they’re boycotting, or are they boycotting the people and what they represented when it was performed at a minstrel show?

Fleming asks. I guess it really is a matter of

know the truth.

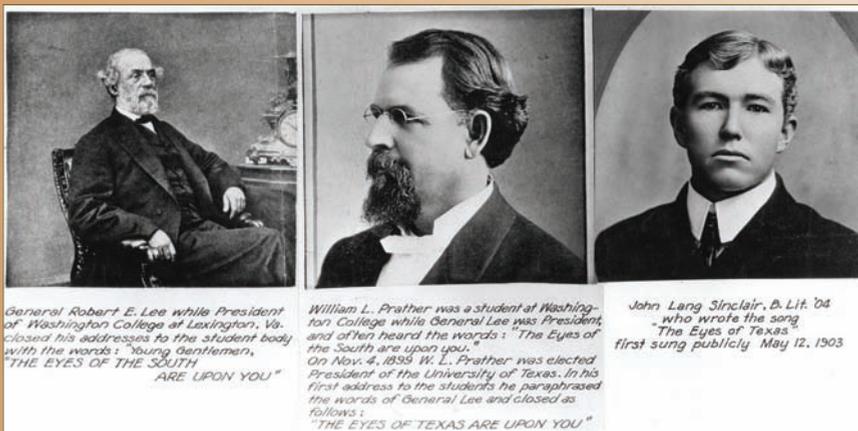
Despite the lack of diversity on campus, some students note the alma mater brings individuals together in support of the University and helps create a more diverse campus population.

Kiah Lewis, an African-American who is a current government and UTeach-Liberal Arts major in the College of Liberal Arts, says: You feel really united as a school, as if you’re a part of a long-standing tradition each time you hear an audience sing the school song.

Since UT students sing The Eyes of Texas from their first steps on campus at orientation to their last steps at graduation, the song today is as much an institution at UT as the 40 Acres. Still, few people have probably read all three stanzas of the alma mater, and realize the part they sing loudly makes up only eight of the 20 lines of the song.

Fleming’s appointment as drum major also seems to have helped more women appear at the halftime show as well. In 1992 he assisted Julia Cook in becoming the first female drum major (1992-93); and two other women followed her footsteps: Christi Cuellar (1994-95), the first Hispanic drum major, and Kim Shuttlesworth (2005-06).

Glenn Richter recalls many people being tolerant of Cook’s appointment as the first female drum major, but he still received anonymous comments and messages about a drum major wearing a dress. That’s the world we live in and I hope it gets better, he says.



General Robert E. Lee while President of Washington College at Lexington, Va. closed his addresses to the student body with the words: "Young Gentlemen, THE EYES OF THE SOUTH ARE UPON YOU"

William L. Prather was a student at Washington College while General Lee was President, and often heard the words: "The Eyes of the South are upon you." On Nov. 4, 1834 W. L. Prather was elected President of the University of Texas. In his first address to the students he paraphrased the words of General Lee and closed as follows: "THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU"

John Lang Sinclair, B. Lit. '04 who wrote the song "The Eyes of Texas" first sung publicly May 12, 1903

Photo: Center for American History, UT-Austin

Photos: Center for American History, UT-Austin Robert E. Lee, William Prather and John Lang Sinclair, Eyes of Texas, Longhorn Band