

American Studies 430
American Humor
M - Th: 3:30 - 4:50
GHH 108
Roger Williams University
Fall Semester, 2010

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Week of September 20

For **Monday, September 20**

Southern Humor, II.

On the Internet, read, from A. B. Longstreet's [GEORGIA SCENES](#).

[The Fight](#) pp. 53 - 64

[The Character of a Native Georgian](#). pp. 32 - 52

"Well, Billy," said Bob, "let's be friends. Once in the fight, when you had my finger in your mouth, and was peeling me in the face and breast, I was going to halloo; but I thought of Betsy, and knew the house would be too hot for me if I got whipped when fighting for her, after always whipping when I fought for myself."

"Now that's what I always love to see," said a by-stander. "It's true I brought about the fight, but I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't o' been on account of Miss (Mrs.) Durham. But dod eternally darn my soul, if I ever could stand by and see any woman put upon, much less Miss Durham. If Bobby hadn't been there, I'd o' took it up myself, be darned if I wouldn't, even if I'd o' got whipped for it. But we're all friends now."

As Rourke has shown us, the comic Southerner goes back way before *The Dukes of Hazard*, or *Gomer Pyle*. In today's readings you'll meet some early variants on the theme, and through them, some of the observations about *the brag* will gain a little life. What kind of person would be named *Ransy Sniffle*? Billy and Bob? Well, those are stereotypes, too. I think you'll like this story. You'll read about scenes similar to some you may remember from *Brother Where Art Thou*, if you saw the film.

You'll meet a broad array of Southern types in *The Character of a Native Georgian*. This time our "hero" is the pseudonymous *Ned Brace*. Ned liked *"to live only to amuse himself with his fellow beings, and he possessed the rare faculty of deriving some gratification of his favourite propensity from almost every person whom he met, no matter what his temper, standing, or disposition."*

Of course he had opportunities enough of exercising his uncommon gift, and he rarely suffered an opportunity to pass unimproved. The beau in the presence of his mistress, the fop, the pedant, the purse-proud, the over-fastidious and sensitive, were Ned's favourite game". Hmmmm. Maybe Ned Brace is really A. B. Longstreet. What do you think?

Record your reactions to these tales in your Journal. Have you ever known a character like Ransy Sniffle? There are *two* fights in this story. One between a couple of ladies. Don't neglect that one. You're going to run across some politically incorrect language and humor in *The Character*. What do you make of it? Comment on that in your journal, as well.

For **Thursday, September 23**

Read, in Rourke

IV *That Long-Tail'd Blue* pp. 70 - 91

Among this shadowy group there was one powerful exception, one typed destined to capture the popular fancy: The Negro.

Rourke's *shadowy group* were ethnic minorities (Dutch, Irish, Germans, etc.) who *didn't* become lasting objects of humor in the period before the Civil War. This will change dramatically in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as we will see in a few weeks.

You're going to encounter Black Americans through two sets of eyes here. First, through the eyes of the white minstrel in blackface, and second, through tales arising from the black experience itself. Next week we'll pursue our consistent pattern and look at examples beyond those Rourke gives us. For now, speculate on why white audiences would find whites portraying blacks worthy of attention—worthy enough to pay to watch...worthy enough to provide a new form of entertainment, the *Minstrel Show*.

Internet Assignment:

Read,

[*The Black American Joker*](#) (1897)

You don't have to read the whole pamphlet—just enough to get a feel for it. You'll see there is a standard format for these kinds of routines—the *interlocutor* sets up comic replies from his partner. (The format transfers to vaudeville and to television shows later). I'd like to get a couple of teams in the class to go through a routine. Any volunteers?