



2-8-2023

Gettysburg College Life in Fall 1963

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Recommended Citation

Huegel, Mary, "Gettysburg College Life in Fall 1963" (2023). *CAFE Symposium 2023*. 15.
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Gettysburg College Life in Fall 1963

Abstract

The 1960s were a tumultuous decade full of social change and political conflict. This project explores Gettysburg College life in the fall semester of 1963 from a variety of scopes.

Keywords

1963, college life in 1960s, 1960s, Gettysburg College

Disciplines

Higher Education | United States History

Comments

This poster was created based on work completed for FYS 170-3: The Sixties Revisited, and presented as a part of the eighth annual CAFE Symposium on February 8, 2023.



Gettysburg College Life in Fall 1963

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Gettysburg

COLLEGE

Introduction

The 1960s were a tumultuous decade full of protest, social change, assassinations, and war. College campuses were not isolated from this change. In fact, some campuses were breeding grounds for protest and independent thinking. While Gettysburg College wasn't as radical as a school like UC Berkeley, it was still impacted by the developments of the 1960s. This project dives into Gettysburg College life in the fall semester of 1963.

Why Fall 1963?

• Change was in motion by 1963 and Americans nationwide were experiencing its effects. The Civil Rights Movement was in progress, American involvement in Vietnam was increasing, and underrepresented Americans were developing a new rights consciousness.

• 1963 was the centennial anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, making it a historical year on campus.

• November 22, 1963, marks the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. How would an institution founded in history react to this earth-shattering event?



"President John F. Kennedy is seen riding in motorcade approximately one minute before he was shot in Dallas, TX, on Nov. 22, 1963. (AP)" by [mashina](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Research Process

• Gettysburg College Special Collections and College Archives contains oral histories, meeting minutes, copies of the *Spectrum*, issues of the *Gettysburgian*, athletics records, and alumni work. The majority of research was conducted in Special Collections in Musselman Library or by using virtual access of these works.

• Two Gettysburg alumni from the class of 1963, Susan Cunningham Euker and Donald Burden, were interviewed about their experiences at Gettysburg College, especially during their last semester. Their stories brought the written information in Special Collections to life and added personality to the research.



Donald Burden '63, *Spectrum*, 1963, p. 201, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College



Susan Cunningham '63, *Spectrum*, 1963, p. 203, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Tradition

- Dances, parades, and big weekends filled up the social lives of students.
- Homecoming and IFC dance, Sophomore Class Night and Freshman Dance.
 - Homecoming and IFC queens.
- Alumni Weekend – parade, pep rally, open houses at fraternities, a dance.
- Fathers' Weekend – Father of the Year award.
- Feeling of camaraderie throughout campus.



College dance, *Spectrum* p. 48, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Athletics

- 10 varsity and 7 freshman sports.
- Football and men's basketball attracted the most school spirit.
 - Phil "Snuffy" Parsons – leading running back and 6th black man to graduate from Gettysburg.
- Competed in Middle Atlantic Conference, with rivals Bucknell and Lafayette.
- If the football team won the game on the weekend before Thanksgiving, students got the Monday after off from classes.
- Whenever the football team won, Glatfelter Hall would ring its bells.
- Men's cross-country ended 11-1 and established a school record of 19 consecutive wins between 1962 and '63.
- Intramurals were popular between fraternities and sororities.



Gettysburg College football, *Spectrum*, 1963, p. 166, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Freshman Customs

- Freshman customs aimed to promote class unity and school spirit.
- Freshmen had to wear dinks – a type of beanie – and signs with their hometown and name.
- Freshmen could not walk on the grass.
- Freshmen had to memorize the Alma Mater, college hymn, cheers, and the names of the heads of all departments.
- Freshmen were told to greet everyone with the Gettysburg "hello," tip their dinks whenever an upperclassman said "button frosh," hold the door for faculty members and upperclassmen, and greet the football team at the locker room at all home games.
- Tug-of-war between sophomore and freshmen men.
- 200 underclassmen in 1963 staged an impromptu riot where they burned their signs and dinks.

Findings

Religious Life

- Compulsory chapel attendance three times a week.
- Two semesters of Biblical Literature and Religion.
- Majority of undergraduate population practiced a form of Judeo-Christian religion.
- Student Christian Association sponsored speakers and retreats.
- Reverend Vannorsdall, the college chaplain, connected with students about faith and combined spirituality with intellect.

Greek Life

- 62% of freshmen men and 66% of freshmen women pledged to join Greek Life.
- Rushing process in the first week of freshman year.
 - "Summer rush" – brothers visited the homes of incoming freshmen and promoted their fraternity.
- Service was the publicized theme, but fraternities were more famous for their social weekends.
- Christmas House Decoration competition between fraternity houses as well as women's dorms.
- Parade float competition for Homecoming game.



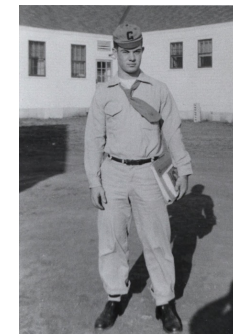
Fraternity House Christmas Decorations, *Spectrum*, 1963, p. 59, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Politics

- Gettysburg College bubble closed off from political and social turmoil.
- Indifference towards the Vietnam War and Civil Rights protests.
 - Slight worry about draft.
- Gettysburg wasn't changing with the times.
- November 22, 1963: assassination of President John F. Kennedy.
 - Students took busses to Washington to witness funeral procession.
- Students felt administration did the bare minimum – football game was cancelled but powderpuff game proceeded on Nov. 22; classes were held on the funeral date.
- 1963 was a quiet year but change was brewing.

Gender & Race

- 1,224 men and 629 women = 2:1 male-female ratio.
- Women had to abide by a curfew.
- Housemothers monitored sign-out books in women's dorms.
- Women had to wear dresses, heels, and pantyhose for Tuesday/Thursday night dinners and Sunday dinners.
- Women could not live off-campus.
- Little overt racism, rather an air of ignorance by white people.
- Overwhelmingly white campus full of middle- or upper-class students.
- One or two black people in each year.
- Eight African Americans graduated from Gettysburg in the entire decade of the 1960s.
- Minorities represented many white students' first interactions with black people.
- Discrimination off campus: whites-only barbershop, black couples on dates at restaurants had to wait longer, town members shouted slurs, confederate flags in town.



Bob Siebold '56 wearing freshman customs attire, including a dink, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Conclusions

Even though the semester studied was fall of 1963, Gettysburg College was still largely in the 1950s at that time. Students did not notice the social changes and political turmoil taking place outside of campus. It took the rise of the student movement, escalation of the Vietnam War, and the development of the counterculture to bring Gettysburg into the present. The women's movement did not reach Gettysburg College until the early 70s, meaning that women had to abide by restrictions such as curfew and housing limitations.

The culture of the college in 1963 matched the campus spirit of the '50s. Football and men's basketball reigned supreme in the athletic world. There was no attention paid to women's sports. Women had limited options in athletics and did not receive any reporter coverage. Fraternities and sororities were social kingdoms and essential to gain connections. Gettysburg College was still very dedicated to tradition, demonstrated through freshman customs. Dances were very popular social events and select weekends, like Homecoming or Alumni Weekend, were full of festivities on campus.

The fall of 1963 was a semester full of camaraderie and brotherhood. Whether they were in the bleachers of the football stadium for Homecoming, in the ballroom for the IFC Dance, or at a fraternity for a Christmas party, Gettysburg students came together to form a community.



Gettysburg College women preparing for IFC weekend, *Spectrum*, 1963, p. 57, Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Dr. Michael Birker, professor of the First Year Seminar "The Sixties Revisited."

Special thanks to Ron Couchman and all of the helpful people in Special Collections & College Archives.

Thank you to Susan Cunningham Euker and Donald Burden for dedicating their time to their interviews.