



FROM THE POLITY

It's a Road! It's a Way! It's a... Desire Path?

Chances are you've seen them around and barely noticed them: short dirt paths eroding away well-kept sod. Have you ever wondered how they got there? The answer is base human instinct.

Desire paths are created by humans taking the shortest route between two points and typically occur when the paved/planned path takes a longer or more-circuitous one. In some places, desire paths are actively studied by landscapers and engineers to learn from the wisdom of the herd and pave accordingly. In others, they are roped off to prevent further soil erosion.

In the U.S., due to our lack of pedestrian infrastructure, desire paths can be found where the sidewalk ends, along the sides of roads, and between car parks and stores. Another place is on college campuses since they are some of the few pedestrianized areas in the country. Poor planning and hurried students combine to create desire paths on many campuses around the world.

In a place like St. John's, we have few desire paths. 300 years of constant habitation have allowed many of our naturally-created paths to be paved over in an orderly-angled array of bricks. There are a few left, however, where the aversion to paving over everything has us keeping some grassy plots. The Quad may be the most glaring example, as many different desire paths criss-cross the grass square and turn it into a mud patch. A more classic example would be the one next to Chase-Stone, leading to the East side of Pinkney .

Some see desire paths as a nuisance and an eyesore. Others laud them as they fly in the face of the rigid lines of modern landscaping. There's even a whole subreddit (r/desirepath) dedicated to them. Love them or hate them, they're sticking around until we can always predict the movements of a crowd. And even then, we may still surprise our landscapers.

Caleb Briggs

Editor's Note: this is not a typical From the Polity article, but I did not have any submissions of opinion this week. I know all of you have opinions, please send them to me. The Collegian needs them!

COLLEGE HISTORICAL TASKFORCE ORGANIZES PANEL ON KEY

Taskforce, Created to Examine College History and Examine the College's Responsibility Today, Hopes to Spark Dialogue

St. John's College has seen much in its 240 years of history, from its founding in the tumultuous days immediately following the American Revolution to its slow and quiet decline throughout the last half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, and into the new program that has defined the past 87 years. This history is inseparable from the state of the College today; every aspect of life in the Polity is shaped by it, with an even greater impact on the relationship of the College with the wider world. However, much of this history, especially that which predates the New Program, is forgotten or unacknowledged, outside of a few anecdotes about Humphreys Hall having been a morgue, or McDowell burning down.

We pay lip service to our history, claiming the distinguished 1696 founding date (a myth that I hope to dispel in a future article), and displaying pride in our 19th century architecture, but we rarely pause to think about how the College's history, and particularly history of discrimination and slavery, has made the Polity we have today. While it might be nice to imagine the New Program as its own isolated bubble, a Republic in Speech brought forth by the sheer intellectual will of its founders, it is not. Because of this reluctance to look back practically, there has long been a need to reckon with the historical legacy of the College.

In the summer of 2020, a group arose hoping to do exactly that. "It was the summer of George Floyd's murder," explained Adrian Trevisan, Chair of the College Historical Taskforce. "Roughly the same time, there were two open letters from alumni to the college, and a webinar." These events, all calling on the college to address systemic racism, and to make concrete changes in the day-to-day operations of the College, and which lead to the creation of the campus Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Taskforce inspired Trevisan to think. "Well, let's look at our Annapolis campus that's built in the 1700s for a bunch of white kids in Maryland. So there's got to be slavery in there. And we really ought to be doing something to research our history and to figure out some way to acknowledge it." Trevisan, who is a board member, reached out to the then Board of Visitors and Governors chair Ron Fielding, who agreed that this was an important project. Trevisan expected that Fielding would then pass the task to someone else, but instead found himself responsible for putting his idea into action. By

the Fall of 2020, Trevisan had put together a group of tutors, students, board members, staff members and historians to begin examining the College's history. Since then, they have been researching, discussing, and seeking ways to get funding to do more detailed work on the history of the College.

Central to the work of the task force was the question of what it means to address the College's history. Many other institutions have been struggling with similar questions, with particular focus on who gets to be commemorated by names of buildings, or how the institution's impact on the community may be built on legacies of discrimination. In Annapolis, there is a long history of slavery that is irrevocably tied up with the founding of the College, but hard to document, as well as later tensions between St. John's and the neighboring Clay Street community. The way we remember important Annapolis figures is also caught up in this history: Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, and Charles Carroll all held slaves, while the College's most famous alumnus and the namesake of the FSK auditorium, Francis Scott Key, had a complex history as a slaveholder, as well as a lawyer for Black people suing for their freedom. How to address these issues remains a major topic of discussion.

At St. John's, there are additional complications created by the unique position of the College's campus in Santa Fe, which, being created in the middle of the twentieth century, sometimes seems to have a level of distance from many of the injustices in New Mexico's history. Salomon Cordova, a former student representative from Santa Fe, argued otherwise. Beyond the responsibility anyone who purchases land in New Mexico has to address its theft from indigenous people, he said, "St. John's kind of triggered the beginning of gentrification in Santa Fe, they started to bring in mostly white facing individuals who are intellectuals... and they came with money... I think addressing that requires a bit more nuance and more work to be done by the College."

"Knowing history gives people a better, a more complete sense of what it means to be a Johnnie," explained Trevisan. "Slavery, that's part of it... you need to know about it and then you need to figure out what you're going to do about it." For now, the taskforce has begun by commissioning a series of

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This Week in Seminar

Freshman:

- 11/16: Plato: Phaedo, 57A–84B
- 11/29: Plato: Phaedo, 84B–118B

Sophomores:

- 11/16: Plotinus: see official list for selections
- 11/20: Augustine: Confessions, I–V

Juniors and Seniors:

- Preceptorials

Friday Night Lecture:

Marcel Proust's Turning of the Table, Rebecca Goldner

Upcoming Events:

Thursday 11/16

- 3 pm, Mitchell Art Museum: 20 minute tour of exhibitions

Friday 11/17

- Noon, Private Dining Room: Montessori International info session

Saturday 11/18

- 7 pm, FSK Auditorium: Duchess of Malfi

Sunday 11/19

- 7 pm, FSK Auditorium: Duchess of Malfi

DUCHESS OF MALFI: Exclusive Interview of Director Jack Domanski about Play Showing this Weekend

The play, The Duchess of Malfi, is set to be performed this weekend in the FSK. To get a better idea of the dramaturgical delights that await us, I accosted the director, Mr. Jack Domanski, on a dark Quad.

Question: Without using the phrase “a Jacobean Revenge tragedy” give a brief summary of the play.

Answer: It revolves around the Duchess of Malfi who is recently widowed who has two brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal and they are both jealous over her domestic life and encourage her not to marry again–

Q. What comprises her domestic life?

A. Her domestic life is one– she decides to marry her steward, Antonio, in secret, against the wishes of her brothers and they lead a secret life with three children for several years until their brothers find out

through the means of their spy Daniel de Bosola who is a mercenary who served the Cardinal for several years as a galley slave. What unfolds from this is a series of death and tragedy.

Q. Does it end well?

A. I think you could well infer from “death and tragedy” that it does not end well but–

Q. Very good, next question: What part of the play are you most excited about?

A. I am excited for the Duchess’s final scenes of the play. I think that Acacia gives a phenomenal performance and the audience will be quite astonished by it. I think also the scenes where Ranger Kasdorf goes wild as Ferdinand will also blow the audience away. I’m also excited–

Q. This is a short article; we’re going to move on. What part of the play has been the most challenging?

Mr. Domanski buried his face in his hands for a moment before muttering “Jesus.”

A. Almost all of it–

Q. And finally, are you bothered that we look the same?

A. I am deeply bothered by it.

The Duchess of Malfi, a Jacobean revenge tragedy, featuring Acacia Burnham, Ranger Kasdorf, Max Mersmann-Jones, and Khanya Mnisi is coming to the FSK at 7 p.m. on November 18th and 19th.

Caleb Briggs

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

New Exhibit at Mitchell Museum Shows Video Art

The combination of different sounds from different places in the room is striking. Screens and projected videos line the walls, and the floor plan is open, so all of the audio mingles to create a single backdrop. Nonstop speech collides with the sound of a person imitating a wolf howl, and it takes a moment to realize that the majority of the pieces don’t have audio at all, but are silent by design. The performance art movement of the early 1960s gradually turned to film and video as new mediums through which to express their art. The Mitchell Art Museum’s current exhibition, which runs until December 10, highlights seven pieces of film and video art from the late 1960s and 1970s in the United States. It’s important to note that the only information written on the labels on the walls next to the pieces are the artist’s name and the duration of the video. One piece features a cat eating out of a bowl while a person circles it slowly (15:37 min), and one shows the artist putting on makeup and getting dressed for the day (38 min). Don’t worry, the names of the pieces and the years they were created are still displayed on the wall near the door of the exhibit, but it’s important to this exhibition to focus the most on the element of time. Some of the videos are more flashy and less mundane, but even these ones are made fascinating by their durations. How much time to spend with each piece of art is up to the viewer, but seeing the exact amount of time the artist intended for the piece to take up can compel the audience to stick around to see the whole thing. It’s illuminating to find out which pieces are worth the wait.

Natalie Goldman

Pensée of the Week

Dish washers are the prime example of modern capitalism. We put dirty things in a closed box and hope someone else would take care of them

Historical Taskforce, Cont.

reports on figures that have buildings named after them who were important to the College’s founding, and which should prove helpful for promoting more informed conversation about their legacies and how the College can address them. These reports should be completed this winter, and be distributed throughout the Polity.

They should also form the starting point for a series of forums, beginning with one on Key later this year. The forum, which will feature Annapolis community members and historians, to help examine who Key was, what his impact was on the College, and Annapolis as a whole, and why it matters how we remember him. In particular, Key’s complex relationship with slavery, and his close ties with the College, including his founding of the alumni association, will be discussed. In part, this conversation hopes to be a starting point for more concrete action, whether that may include suggesting the College rename the hall, work to help mend legacies of its impact on the Annapolis Community, or help educate about Key’s complex past.

The task force is not primarily aimed externally, however. It hopes to encourage conversation and reflection within the Polity, particularly amongst the student body, who often have not been very well informed about College history. “Your years on campus are the beginning of your life as a Johnnie. You’ll be a Johnnie all your life, so the history of the college will matter for you for a long time,” said Trevisan. “I would hope that in addition to students studying history for knowledge for its own sake, students would be interested in reading the histories that we will have, and tell us if it matters or not. If they read it and say ‘eh, I don’t have any problems with that, then that’s as good information as saying that we have to change things. What we’re asking is, read these reports, and tell us what you think.”

It is not easy to address so many centuries of history, but in a way very appropriate to the College, the taskforce hopes to do so by conversation. Only by discussion, based on the grounding texts of the stories of our own past, can we, as a Polity, decide what our responsibilities are to address our College’s legacy, and what it really means to be conscientious citizens of the Polity’s present in light of its past.

El’ad Nichols-Kaufman

ABOUT THE ST. JOHN’S COLLEGIAN

The St. John’s Collegian is the weekly newspaper of St. John’s College Annapolis. We work to bring quick and timely coverage of important events going on, to help develop a more informed student body. If you’re searching for more in-depth investigations and reporting, as well as essays, art and culture, check out the Gadfly, our affiliated publication, which is published once every three weeks.

Want to submit an article? We always need more writers, whether for opinion or reporting! Submissions for news articles should be between 350-450 words, while opinion should be kept short at 300 words. Just email eanicholskaufman@sjc.edu with your article, and we will work to get it in print! Longer form articles and more in-depth exploration of ideas should go to the Gadfly, which accepts submissions at lbriner@sjc.edu.

Contributors for this issue:

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Notice of Elections

The Delegate Council will be holding elections on Tuesday, December 5th for four Freshman Representative positions, as well as the positions of President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Polity Herald. People interested in running should contact the Polity Attorney, Ranna Kiswani, with any questions about eligibility or election procedure.