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First Century. Custom and Tradition in a  
Modern Early Banjo Revival.



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# NINETEENTH-CENTURY BANJOS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CUSTOM AND TRADITION IN A MODERN EARLY BANJO REVIVAL



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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates how members of a modern music revival use the banjo to create a counter narrative to America's whiteness. Within this revival, nineteenth-century banjos are

central to a growing interest in antebellum, early minstrel, and Civil War era music and culture. As researchers, collectors, musicians, and instrument builders pursue this interest, they explore the dissonances of the legacies surrounding slavery, blackface minstrelsy, and the traumas of the American Civil War. Framing this phenomenon within Eric Hobsbawm's theories of custom and tradition and Thomas Turino's concepts of habits, socialization, and cultural cohort relationships, I argue that this modern revival supports a form of critical ethnography aimed for advocacy on three fronts--advocacy that challenges marginalizing stereotypes, promotes opportunities to rethink the banjo's cultural significance as a national instrument of whiteness, and creates greater infrastructure for the knowledge and material culture amassed by members of the banjo community.

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