COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Video Transcript: Columbia University & Slavery Panel

Welcome [00:00]

Courtney Chartier:
Hello and welcome to Columbia, and especially welcome to Butler Library. My name is Courtney Chartier, and I am the Director of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library here at Columbia, and I'm delighted that you've all joined us today for this panel about the Columbia University and Slavery program, which is an ongoing program here and that's a collaboration between the Department of History, the President's Office, and the Columbia Libraries.

And I'm especially pleased to welcome you to RBML and this program because the Rare Book and Manuscript Library not only has extensive archives related to the international slave trade, to Columbia itself, but as well as the New York area. And while we are the home of many amazing primary sources we're also the home of a fantastic team of research curators, and I'm especially pleased it on the panel today is Dr. Thai Jones, Curator for American History, who not only continues to expand the collection but works very hard to bring in scholars and students, and in particular our undergraduate students to interpret those documents and find a way to bring them to life for another type of impact in our current moment.

So I'm going to introduce our four panelists today and then let them get started directly. To my right is Stephanie McCurry, the R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History in Honor of Dwight D Eisenhower. Dr. McCurry specializes in the American Civil War and Reconstruction, the 19th century United States, the American South, and the history of women and gender. She is currently teaching the Columbia University and Slavery seminar. Thai Jones, Curator of American History at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library has taught the seminar on three occasions and works with students and faculty to identify and interpret archival research materials. Olganydia Plata is a senior at Columbia College majoring in Archaeology. A member of the 2021 seminar, her research focused on Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston, and the interconnections of racism and anthropology. Jerry Chen is a senior at Columbia College majoring in History. Also a member of the 2021 seminar his research focused on Columbia College and the Draft Riots of 1863. Please join me in welcoming our panelists.

Panelists [02:31]

Stephanie McCurry:
Well, good afternoon everybody. Welcome to Columbia on this gorgeous fall day. I hope you're enjoying your visit with your kids. I remember my two of these when my kids were in college, so I hope you're having fun. So what I want to do is just tell you a little bit about this project and where it fits in a

larger movement and what's distinctive about the way that the project has evolved here at Columbia, which I think is represented by the nature of this panel. So in recent years, historians, scholars, and journalists all across the United States have really in various ways been attempting to grapple or address more openly the legacy of slavery in American life this is part of public debate in a way it just wasn't 15 or 20 years ago and the whole effort I think is really about trying to grasp the weight of the past on the present and to try to find some ways to address the harms and injuries of enslavement that last into the present generation, and into our lives in the present. And one part of that effort, one smallish part, is a growing network of universities who are committed to investigating the connections between their institutions of higher education and histories of enslavement. And that might sound kind of obscure, but when you think about when American colleges and universities were founded, in the era of slavery, it becomes more clear that those are entwined histories. And so Columbia and the Columbia University and Slavery project is part of that, although as I said there are some very distinctive aspects about the way we do this.

So this whole interest in the relationship between higher ed universities and slavery started back in 2006 when Ruth Simmons, who was then president of Brown University, formed a committee to study the issue on their campus. It was Ruth Simmons, who is now at Prairie View University HBCU, who launched this this whole thing. Now this was an obvious question to ask about Brown University, which was named after the one of the most prominent slave trading families in the United States. So like this was an overdue and dangerous question to ask at Brown. And the report on slavery and justice that they published ran to 90 Pages. It detailed not only Brown's involvement in the slave trade and enslavement but the hidden history of slavery in New England. It really was an important contribution to scholarship and its own right and the ties to the financial history of the institution. And it insisted in in the end that we understand quote slavery is a crime against humanity, a very modern 20th century formulation of how we might think about that.

And what started with Brown and other private universities in the north, is now a network of at least fifty institutions reaching into southern public Schools, law schools, medical schools, and other professional schools. And it's also spreading in other countries, this question about the relationship between higher ed and slavery. So just recently faculty at CU -- me first, and then a group of us, were recently visited by a scholar from Brazil who is launching a project on slavery in a prominent Sao Paulo law school. And just a couple weeks ago, a couple of us were visited by a politician from the green party in Germany who was interested in what we were doing. So this kind of set of enquiries at is expanding in England and on the and the EU universities also.

So our part of this, the Columbia University and slavery project got off the ground in 2015, and when Eric Foner, my distinguished predecessor in the Civil War history here researched and wrote a report on the history slavery and Columbia. And the seminar was first taught in 2015 by Professor Karl Jacoby and Thai Jones here with me today. We still regularly teaches Thai, me, Karl. This semester is the eighth time the seminar is being offered and I'm teaching it this year.

More recently, in response to students' interest, a Colombia and slavery project kind of expanded its efforts before 18 --beyond 1865, into the twentieth century to examine the legacies of slavery and racism on campus in neighboring Harlem and in the city, and that takes shape in a seminar usually taught by Professor Frank Guridy that's called Columbia 68 so that these are linked ways that we get ourselves and our students into the twentieth Century.

So the courses offered an intensive guided research experience for undergraduates students Olga and Jerry went through that, and this year there are ten. I don't mean go through it like an ordeal, I mean they went through it like we went -- we do the work together and this year there are ten students in the seminar, everywhere from freshman to senior. So we have a distribution of students, and every year we start the seminar by taking them to the Rare Books and Manuscript Library, where Professor Jones lays out a series of documents for them to look at. Now it can be kind of intimidating to walk into an archive. You know I was not in one until I was a doctoral student, so just getting them up there is a really important– that's a the guided part, like you come with us, don't be intimidated. And it's just amazing to watch what happens when they get into the room, when he lays stuff out on the table: 18th century maps of Manhattan early twentieth-century maps of Manhattan coded to show the movement of the black population; city directories listing every business in 1861; black woman's Freedom papers; minutes of Trustees meetings from the mid-nineteenth century; correspondence about buying real estate in Harlem and that's all laid out and you just watch them one student in the class this year spent the whole time reading the city directory. Like they've never seen things like this before and next week they're going back to work on particular document that they selected for their individual research projects, so that's another way we overcome the start of anxiety about entering archival researches. Thai's there, we're there, we help them and pretty soon they get addicted. I think that's fair to say. So in the process of the seminar and doing their own research, the students learn a lot about the history of Columbia as an institution and also about slavery in New York. And these are two different, but related subjects.

So I thought maybe you might like to learn a little bit about it today so they were not talking in the void here. If you see this map, this is Columbia University and its three locations and iterations, so on the far left you see King's College as it was called when it was founded in 1754, Downtown, almost at the tip of Manhattan. It had, as its name suggests King's College a very royalist, Tory identity. During the Revolution and when you pick the wrong side you got to recover, so they renamed at Columbia College after the American Revolution, more suiting. And then it moved to Midtown just before the Civil War where is what is now the Rockefeller Center is, and I believe continued to own that real estate for quite some time after they moved up to we moved Uptown and moved to Morningside Heights. Here we are where we are now.

In 1897, there's also as you might know a Medical Campus There's also as you might know a Medical Campus on the 160s in Manhattan and most recently the acquisition of a bunch of property just north of here now called the Manhattanville campus at which is in the 120s and low 130s so what is there to know -- what can I tell you in two seconds, about the relationship between Columbia and slavery in New York City? The ties to slavery at Columbia are not as obvious as they were at Brown, nor in the Southern Universities. And as Courtney said, I'm a southern historian so I'm not trying to tell you slavery was the same in the North as the South, but I am trying to tell you that it existed, and that much of the wealth of the United States including the wealth in the North came out of slavery and the Commodities that were produced by enslaved labor.

From the very start King's College was embedded in a Colonial and after the Revolution and National History completely intertwined with histories of slavery and profit drawn from that. As a legal matter, I just think it's important to say if you haven't thought about this for a while, that slavery, what is slavery? Okay, when you have to remember it is the ownership of human beings as a form of property that confers on the owner all the rights that they would have over any form of property-- the right to buy, sell, transfer, use as collateral, destroy. The courts were never able to limit effectively even the right to

murder, and so as a legal matter, the law vested virtually unlimited authority in the owner of that human property and gave them legal title to the children who were born of enslaved women. So this is what it is, and it is embedded in every aspect of the history of the United States. I want to just make it clear that in the United States, it was a status reserved exclusively for people of African descent, and that's part of the reason we're still grappling with it today. King's College was founded in a moment and in a part of the world where the legitimacy of slavery was entirely unquestioned. It just wasn't at a moral and ethical issue to most white people; it always of course was to those who were enslaved.

King's College, and Columbia College after it, was a merchant College, built on merchant wealth. And that's where the connections are for Columbia. The richest merchants in the eighteenth century were the people who traded in the products of African slave labor: sugars in the 18th century, it was the West Indies sugar plantations -- rum. In the nineteenth century, it was cotton plantations in the South. So that was what merchants bought and sold and that was what the richest merch-- you know there were other people who were in the whaling industry, but the big money was in commodities produced in the West Indies, and then later in the 19th century South. Needless to say, this is a bloody history, and we can't turn our faces away from that.

The legitimacy of slavery only began to be questioned as an institution during the American Revolution because of its obvious contradiction and trammeling of the idea of human liberty as a human right. And thank God for that. It was gradually abolished in New York starting - sorry with the law of 1797, 1799, but it was a gradual emancipation law which left people enslaved into the 1830s. Even in New York, even later in New Jersey. So slavery students in our seminar learn about the institution of slavery and they learn a lot about the history of slavery itself. It's not a subject well taught in high school. It has very regional patterns to how it's taught, that are worrisome. And what they begin to understand is first just how fundamental slavery was to the wealth of the United States as it grew as a nation, and then as an international power. Not just in the South, but in the North, and by 1860 especially a New York City which was already emerging as the financial capital of the country.

In 2005, some of you might know if you're New Yorkers, the New York Historical Society ran this Blockbuster exhibit called Slavery in New York, and it was completely stunning to people. I mean I was there. I was walking around those rooms and you could hear people saying, "I had no idea. You know, I just didn't know there was slavery New York." Well, you're not supposed to know, right? You weren't supposed to know. It's much more comfortable for Americans to think about slavery as a southern institution that southern states have to answer for, but not Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, but there had been slavery in New York. The biggest population of black people in the northern states was in New York state and city at one point, and what did enslaved people do in New York? Well, they worked in domestic service. It wasn't Plantation labor obviously in the city, but they did work as enslaved rural laborers on estates and rural New York in the Hudson Valley, and in New Jersey there was tons of real agriculture using enslaved labor. Sojourner Truth for example, was from New York, Dutch New York.

So by the by the time of the American Civil War, New York City was already what one Columbia PhD called a "moneyed metropolis." It was emerging as the financial capital. That role got consolidated by the Civil War itself but it was on the cusp, and the money that was in New York was inseparable from the wealth that came from slavery because even though the money, the commodity was generated by enslaved labor on cotton plantations, New Orleans was not the epicenter of the slavery economy. New

York City was. All Southerners did was grow cotton. They baled it roughly and sent it up here where it was graded, insured, financed. The money that planters borrowed to grow it, it was from New York. So like 40 cents of every dollar made on enslaved labor stuck to the hands of somebody in New York City.

And by the nineteenth-century southern cotton plantations and trade were the key to that, not the West Indies anymore, and the wealth of college trustees and donors just drawn from these same sources and so to some extent where the values of people who lived in that world and made their living in it. And it had an effect on the politics of New York at the time of the Civil War. It's really interesting. I mean merchant money tends to be pretty conservative. And merchant money in New York was tied to the cotton trade and to slavery, and they were not Republicans they were Democrats and they were really desperate for a compromise including the longevity of slavery that would allow -- they didn't want a disruption to their business patterns. But they lost, and eventually got on board as wise people do, and by the end of the Civil War the bankers profited enormously from the financing of the war and New York was solidly in the Lincoln column, but it wasn't the beginning of the conflict -- white New York, I should say.

So students in our seminar work on every period of this history, and we try to hold them to 1865 but a lot of people far more interested in the twentieth century. So students have written and are writing papers on everything from The New York Manumissions Society to papers about leading Columbians like John Jay or his son Peter, who was the leading abolitionist lawyer in the 1850s, or Francis Lieber who was a German immigrant and a law professor here and one of Lieber, one of Lincoln's right hand man in writing the laws of war -- became the basis for the Geneva conventions. They have tried to write about enslaved workers on campus; the sources are very unyielding on that. They write about race and admissions practices, the teaching of racial science in anthropology here which you'll hear about, and you'll hear from Olga and Jerry about their projects in a minute.

This year, students' interests cluster around a series of questions about Columbia and its relationships with Harlem. In the early part of the twentieth century as the black migration was making Harlem what it became in the twentieth century and shortly after we moved to this uptown campus in the early part of the twentieth century. As the black migration was making Harlem what it became in the 20th century and shortly after we moved to this campus. They're very interested in various real estate holdings that Columbia have and the way they were used to finance our operations and expansion over the course of these three locations.

One student is writing about the historian William Archibald Dunning, who taught history at Columbia at the turn of the century and was very responsible for a very racist, segregationist history—a history of the Civil War- a way of thinking about the Civil War and reconstruction the really suited the segregationist Jim Crow moment. We have a big responsibility in that it's called the Dunning school. It really wasn't dismantled until like the 1970s, fully. And this year as in other years, students are interested in prominent Columbians, like John Jay, one of the founding fathers of the United States, trying to grasp how a man who helped the next slave emancipation in New York state and founded the New York Manumission Society, himself owned slaves. So that's a really great historical question and they don't get the you don't get the answer you think you're going to get. That's why it's history, that's why it requires research. I tell them they can pontificate at the end, but they can't pontificate the beginning.

Um, one student is working on why Frederick Barnard, who was president of Columbia from the late 1850s, I think for 30 or 40 years --why he was such a strong advocate for women's higher education but seemingly not for the admission of black students of any gender. Now that's a great historical question and the answer is you got to go deep to get an answer to that. In the process they learned a great deal of history, and they also learn how to conduct historical research. It's really kind of like a history lab. Maybe if we used that language we would get more funding; it's really like a history lab; it's a workshop or a medieval workshop, but that wouldn't get us any money so we're going to go with history lab, where they are in the archives working from the sources themselves, running down leads, falling down research rabbit holes. One of my students this week had to spend hours researching what water lots were on Hudson's River, as it was called in the eighteenth century and learning how to write and advance an evidence-based argument. This is why people hire them; they can take mass amounts of information and give you a cogent read on it. So with respect to the seminar and the project as a whole we're at a turning point now you know coming in to eight years of doing all of this and we have a lot of decisions to make, which Thai is going to talk about next. But I know and want you to know that whatever direction we decide to go we are sure of one thing, that unlike the other projects at Harvard and elsewhere, ours will remain student-driven, centered on the seminar, on students' research. It's their research on the history of Columbia and slavery we want to nurture and make public and see into publication, so thank you.

Thai S. Jones:
Thank you. Thank you so much, Stephanie. So you heard a bit about the seminar which really is the heart of this project. Every year, the students in the seminar or have the opportunity to give us a list of suggestions to pass along to Columbia Administration and one of those suggestions has always been that we'd do more outreach at family weekend and also in freshman orientation. Eight years running the students all feel that they wish that the project was better known, especially among students just beginning at Columbia. And beyond the seminar, we have a series of public history initiatives, and I'm going to speak about one in particular. At these universities that have addressed their legacies related to enslavement, one of the questions that has come up again and again surrounds campus architecture and the campus landscape. And so one of the initiatives we're working on involves putting historical markers and information panels into buildings on campus and this process has already begun in Columbia.

Two buildings at Columbia have had their names changed because of the named person's relationship to historical slavery and racism. One building was at Teacher's College and in August 2020 Columbia announced that the name Bard was going to be removed from Bard Hall which was the residence hall the dormitory at the University's Medical Campus on 168th Street. So the name Bard has been on this building for 90 years at that time but recent research done by undergraduates in the university in slavery seminar had revealed that Bard himself was an enslaver. And when students and faculty at the medical center learned about this research they felt extremely strongly that they did not want to live in a building named after someone who had owned slaves. So the student who did this research was named Jordan Brewington who was a member of the 2016 seminar and Jordan was someone who had wanted to get at this question of the presence of enslaved people on campus. And eventually, she decided to search digitized newspapers for a source called the runaway slave ad which enslavers would place in newspapers if one of their slaves had run away. And we thought that Jordan might find two or three of these sources by searching the word run away and then all of the names of Columbia affiliates.

In the end she found 44 ads which was an amazingly large number we thought at the time, and one of these ads was posted by Samuel Bard.

So this is the runaway slave ad that Samuel Bard posted in 1776 , essentially, July 8th 1776 so it's the very week of the Declaration of Independence being signed. And a doctor at the Medical Center read Jordan's paper, saw this advertisement, and led the way in an effort to have the name removed from the building up there. So we knew about this. We didn't know that much more about Bard's history, but further research has shown that the family was certainly among the largest enslavers in the Hudson Valley and owned slaves according to various censuses all the way into the second decade of the 19th century. This is a lease agreement from the 1760s, right at the time that Samuel Bard was getting his medical education, his father leased his Plantation to an overseer, so the funds earned from this lease directly led to Bard being able to afford a medical education.

So this spring, with the story of mind, we launched a project to research and disseminate information about some of the residence halls on campus. So what we had heard repeatedly, was that the idea of people living in these buildings really had a special significance, and there's also several buildings that are named after people who were enslavers, and we can talk about that if anyone has questions. But we begin with the residence halls and in the spring following the traditions of this project we enlisted a group of student researchers. Again, this was a student-led project and these are people on that team. You can see this picture -- we did these scouting visits around campus to look at the building to see what types of historical information was already present and find places for historical markers to go. So this fall we will be placing digital information panels at John Jay, Furnald, Bard, or the former Bard Hall, as well as potentially some others, and these panels will discuss John Jay's history as an enslaver. He was against slavery but also owned slaves his entire life.

We tell the story of a cross burning that happened on campus in 1924 when white students protested a black student who was living in Furnald Hall, one of the pain freshman dormitories, and the Samuel Bard story as well. So the idea of this project is to allow people who live in these residence Halls to begin to have a sense of this history and it's very much an informational project and as I happen to know both Olga and Jerry were in the dorms but didn't know about this history. [coughing] So, as my voice fails me, I'm going to hand this over to Olga.

Olganydia Plata:
Just as refresher, I'm Olganydia Plata. I was a student in the fall 2021 cohort with Professor Jones and was also roped in to the residence hall project last spring. And I think before it speak about my research I think it's really important to talk about what makes this project so special. I think for me as a student the fact that this is student-led a research is incredibly vital. I think just in terms of the residence hall like I think there's a certain perspective of how are you going to research place and what it feels like to inhabit a space when you don't live in that space. For example I lived in John Jay; Jerry lived in Furnald freshman year, and I think just by living there I think we have like a different perspective than like no offense-- administration. There is a certain exigence of what we would like to see because we have lived it. I think it's also what got me into this project.

I am studying archaeology and I think it's my tendency as an archaeology student to want to look at the skeletons in the closet. I --for me for me as I will discuss, there were two kinds of projects I was going into -- the first for the class and the second for the residence hall marker and they really just evolved

from each other. I will be talking about the residence hall marker project first, just to complement what Thai has been saying. But the second one for me, it felt like a responsibility to look at what kind of ideology Columbia was -- has historically promoted in terms of like for example, to give some spoilers to my research, Columbia for many people is the home of American anthropology. It's a place where it basically got its start thanks to Franz Boas but I think it's really important that is a large legacy and it's really important to think about what kind of legacy we are carrying on to this day. And so for both of my projects I very much strayed in terms of time. And so the first I want to talk about first the residence hall project. So I did some research at Barnard in terms of Barnard housing. For me, I wanted to -- the other projects for example they were looking at the cross burnings on Furnald in 1924, and the experience of Langston Hughes and Hartley Hall, and being racially profiled in the lobby his first day here, and how that was a continued experience.

And for me it was really important to look across the street, because for me a really important part of this project going forward is we can't look at Columbia in isolation - especially the physical campus. We have to look at the neighborhood that we're in and even more like even smaller, we have to look at the sister institution we have across the street, because Barnard's campus is Columbia's campus and Columbia's campus is Barnard's campus. It's kind of like a symbiote with symbiotic situation, and so for me for the residence hall project I wanted to better understand through the archives experience of black women at Barnard's campus, especially in housing, and by experience I of course I mean emotionally, but I also wanted to get behind the logistics of what was barring black women from existing in these spaces. A bit of a spoiler --in 1968 the BASS, the Barnard Association of Soul Sisters raised a petition to the dean of Barnard basically saying you have to change the way that we are living here. We are not being respected, we are not being --we don't have the space that we deserve, and like it's a whole manifesto of 17 points that I recommend everyone looking into, but essentially I wanted to know, how did we get to that point and get to the point where students were feeling so disrespected, so not safe in the place that they were living, that they had to they basically had to upheave everything.

And so I -- it's a really long history I think and I want to bring just one part of it to your attention today. So above I included a bit, an exchange of letters that I found in the Barnard archives. Most of my research for the residence hall project was in the archives at Milstein. And this is one example, so here you see on this side is a letter from the dean of Bryn Mawr to Dean Gildersleeve, who was the longest dean at Barnard in its history. She's generally renowned as one of the most important deans in Barnard's history. And the dean of Bryn Mawr was essentially asking Dean Gildersleeve -- Hey we have, we are admitting black students into our College. What do we do with them; where do we house them; do you have any experience with this? And if you can it's kind of hard to see, but towards the end she references her fears for what kind of influence these black women -- the influences black woman would bring to their white peers. And it's kind of this narrative it's- it's a really hard to read and on the other side is Dean Gildersleeve's response and it basically says we haven't housed any black women; we don't have any black students but Columbia does, in their graduate school.

While Columbia did not admit student women into the college until the 1970s, in the graduate program as well as Teachers College, there was a large populace of women graduate students, especially in terms of the Teacher's College. I want to plug in some resources because there has been research done on the role of black women in the Teacher's College, and their experiences, and so I highly recommend for many reasons to check out the Columbia and Slavery website, where you will see like a plethora of student research.

And so thinking about your time here at Columbia visiting Columbia here with your students, I want to just give you the physical evidence, the physical markers of this campus, so the place that Gildersleeve was referring to was Johnson Hall which today is Wien Hall. The name is changed due to a large donation given to the university I think the 80s, but Johnson Hall was a hall that basically housed international students and black women and you can -- it's odd to see this residence hall because I went into the Barnard archives and I checked out kind of like the applications you have to do to get into a dorm room cause that was a system that the college enlisted in in the early 20th century and Johnson Hall is the only application where they ask for race. And it's the only application where they ask towards the end, you see points of like, "What do you eat;" "Where do you go;" "Do you get tired easily?" and I think there's also a giant story related to the afterlives of slavery of regulating black women's bodies on campus and just what it means to like, you living here. And I also want to do the second point of Gildersleeve was erroneous in that there had been black students on Barnard's campus. Zora Neale Hurston transferred from Howard in 1925 and she -she graduated in 1927, enrolled in The Graduate School at Columbia in 1930.

For your reference, I have pulled up in a class image from 1927 in which I have highlighted Zora Neale Hurston, but she is behind that tree. I have also included her part of her application in which she herself (that is her handwriting right there) specified that she was in fact a black woman.

And I think I think it's you see this contradiction of Gildersleeve stating that there were no black students but that simply was not the case. And thinking about the erasure of black woman's experience on campus is something that I think should be honored in the Residence Hall Project and in general, in going forward.

And then Zora Neale Hurston in general for me is at the heart of the research I did in the fall in terms of the anthropology department. Zora Neale Hurston for me if she feels like this wondrous contradiction of she's on this campus at the same time at the same time she enrolls three years after the cross burnings, decides not to live on campus for whatever reason, possibly you know cause she just couldn't live there and like for bureaucratic reasons I just haven't found in the archives yet, partly because of the racial tensions that we're going on, like Langston Hughes being racially profiled at Hartley at the same time she was a student. You know they were really close friends at the time.

And for me, Zora Neale Hurston also interests me in the concept of anthropology. She is the first black student under Franz Boas; in her graduate studies, she was one of his students. And a lot of her more anthropological works coming from the Caribbean were studies that were undergone here at Columbia, in which she, with funding from various places but under the direction of Franz Boas, was sent to the Caribbean to essentially record folkloric traditions. And I think for me, again I recommend going to the Columbia University website. It's really hard to talk about how much research went into that paper in this short amount of time but I essentially wanted to better understand the role of anthropology.

A quick two second discussion of what anthropology, the field anthropology is in the United States. It started as a way to justify both the encroachment of native land and slavery. Early anthropology was mostly phrenological studies, so that is the measurement of cranial capacity-- the measurement of for example, of how big your nose is, and you get a -- In the archives we actually found I think one of the first times we pulled up document is like really expansive classification of races according to their face shape. And that is what American anthropology was pre- the nineteen-twenties. Franz Boas here at

Columbia is in fact one of the people who vehemently went against the racial science of anthropology at the time.

And you know he was going against the racial science of time, against the Dunning school, which was here at the same time as Boas was, and Zora Neale Hurston. But for me it's really interesting to think about. There's another document that I should have included a picture of, in which Franz Boas requests funding for these trips to the Caribbean to better understand what he calls “the black problem.” That's what he says and he uses the language of like “they” “them,” not including who he lists later on as Zora Neale Hurston. He basically separates Zora Neale Hurston from her status as a black woman in this funding request, and so for me it's really interesting to think about the kind of place someone like Zora Neale Hurston and the early black students at Columbia and in the anthropology department had in the larger discourse that was going on in the department. And now I will turn it over to Jerry.

Zirui "Jerry" Chen:
Hi everyone I'm Jerry, a senior in CC. And I guess I'll start by briefly talking about why I was interested in the project in the first place. It was a little bit of an interesting experience for me because I actually attended High School in Alexandria, Virginia which had a very deep tie to enslavement as well, so even in high school I started doing some work on that. And when I arrived in Columbia I thought it would be good to continue this work through by attending the seminar. And to be honest I completely I just did not expect Columbia to have so much ties to racism and enslavement as I expected. And also echoing Olga’s point I lived in Furnald Hall and in freshman year walked by the building so many times and I didn't know that there was a cross burning outside. And now knowing that, it was very interesting to see that the Thomas Jefferson statue outside Pulitzer is right next to the side where the cross burning happened. Then you know, one of them is still enshrined today, but the other is completely forgotten. And I think that definitely made me think about the layout of campus and landscape totally differently.

My research kind of asked a different question, which is like, what happens when Columbia's history to enslavement and racism-- and what happened to it when it's not only temporally distant from where we live, but also spatially, right? So my research focused on Columbia's Midtown campus during the 1863 Draft Riot. And obviously, we live in Morningside now, so you don't see it -- it's not visible. And to me I think that was part of the problem and something that I was interested in finding out about.

So this is actually sort of a juxtaposition of Columbia’s Midtown campus today, as opposed to what it looks like back in the days. Since Hamilton Hall, now it's replaced by a Wells Fargo bank. So definitely no trace of Columbia being there. And certainly if you walk by – so this is between 49th and 50th Street and Madison Avenue and Park Avenue, when you walk by there – it’s right next to St. Patrick's Cathedral. You probably would not even realize that that Columbia there -- there was no landmark or anything pointing you towards that.

So my research was about the 1863 Draft Riots, and for those of you unfamiliar with it, it was just really violent episode that took place during American Civil War where essentially working-class white New Yorkers felt like they were fighting a war for elite Republicans for and also for enslaved slave black people and they also felt like the draft was unfair since a member of the elite could I buy a substitute instead of going to the war. Also this really turned into a really violent riots against not only the elite institutions in the city such as Columbia, but also African Americans in the city. So one of the most notorious incidents that took place in the during the Draft Riots was the burning of the Colored Orphan

asylum on 43rd Street in Midtown. And as I will show, the Columbia Midtown campus was really close to where Colored Orphan Asylum was, right? It was only seven or eight blocks away from that so that it came through my research question of how considering Columbia's Midtown campus proximity to the Draft Riots that took place for 3 days, what was Columbia's role during the Draft Riots, and you know, was it targeted or how was it viewed by the people on the street, and also how it was tied to the bigger question of enslavement and racism.

So I think Columbia was an interesting position at that time on the one hand it was viewed as this elite institution that the mobs really hated. In fact through my research I found that there were mobs on campus during the riot, planning to burn it down because they saw you know Columbia as this merchant college that was perpetually perpetuating this war unfairly but thankfully a few Catholic priests showed up and actually I've stopped the mob from burning it down. But on the other hand Columbia at the time was an extremely conservative institution in as Professor McCurry pointed out, this was the moment of this solidification of the moneyed Metropolis in United States and as a merchant College, a lot of Columbia alumni had ties through their merchant connections to the South. So the school was very conservative on the issue of you know, abolition and enslavement. So this is what I found in a 1856 sort of newspaper op-ed. There was a series of op-eds by the students discussing the composition of the school and in terms of their ideological stance towards abolition. So you can see when they say conservative, they basically just mean that they're pro-slavery. So some of these student organizations still exists today on campus. So I won't read it out but you can see that you know there was an overwhelming sentiment that the school was very conservative on this respect. In fact there was one op-ed saying that there were only three or four student that were actually abolitionists on campus.

See something that I found during the Draft Riot was that you know obviously since school was targeted as this elite institution but there was also this one particular professor who was sympathetic to the Mob to some extent, so there was basically a chemistry physics Professor Richard S. McCullough who was born in Maryland and became a professor at Columbia. And during the Civil War he became sympathizing with the Confederacy. And this is a letter I found from Dr. John Torrey another professor on campus to Hamilton Fish the Chair of the Board of Trustees after the Draft Riots that basically accused this professor to be involved, to take a liking with the mob and actually involved with the riots in the streets during the Draft Riot which was a very surprising find. So I think through my research, I definitely learned a lot more about sort of how Columbia had this connection to this incident of history that I never considered before just because we live in Morningside now and that this was so distant from the past.

Thai S. Jones:
What did you find out about the faculty that participated in the war – what was the – who actually fought in the war?

Zirui "Jerry" Chen:
So, one thing that I also focus on was sort of the role of you know the merchant elites of Columbia in the war. And most notably, this this regimen called the seventh Regiment of militia which was this very elite sort of Riot police regimen that it was composed of the merchant elites of the city. And I found that they played a big role in sort of suppressing this riot and harboring this sort of anti working-class sentiment that would further -- that still existed after the Civil War. For instance, in 1895 when there was Trolley

riots in the city, this regiment which had a disproportionate composition of Columbia affiliates, was put in use to suppress strikes on the street.

Stephanie McCurry:
Their home base was the Park Armory, correct?

Zirui "Jerry" Chen:
Yes, that's correct.

Stephanie McCurry:
Oh the riot? The city was turned upside down for like four or five days pulling troops, they had to call in troops from Gettysburg to suppress this Riot, It was the biggest domestic insurrection in American history to that date. So I don't know in terms of numbers but thousands of Irish immigrants take a lot of heat. I'm Irish so I have to own up to that, but they take enormous heat because they were subject to the draft for the emancipation of black people and black men were not themselves subject to the draft. It was another form of discrimination at that time.

Well, we're delighted to take your questions if you --you're sitting here patiently listening to us. Well, lets give Jerry a round. Jerry's writing his senior thesis right now, with me on the Klan so we've had a we've had a we have another whole pile of research projects going on that they do for their senior thesis. These are one semester research papers – it's really hard. The students this semester have picked their topics but their topics are giant and I sit there like a broken record on Wednesday morning saying, "You need to get a piece of this," you know you need to break off a piece of this stuff but that's part of that's part of the teaching is learning how to address a big problem with a fragment, or a partial approach. And they always laugh when I tell him if I could take eight or ten years to write a book and it's still would only be part of the story. Like nobody can do it all.

Question & Answer [49:23]

Stephanie McCurry:
Anyway, we're delighted to take your questions you have for anybody on the panel, or anything you want to follow up or ask about the history of the class.

Anne Mesquita:
Also, I have the microphone; I can pass it to you so that it can be picked up.

Stephanie McCurry:
Just say who you're addressing it to, or if it's just to the panel, that's fine.

Audience member:
This is kind of a general question to the entire panel. I think about Columbia's expansion and gentrification in to Harlem. Is there any research being done as kind of the ties and the culture of racism going into that and that expansion into Harlem?

Thai S. Jones:
Sure, well the answer is yes, students are always interested in the relationship between Columbia and Harlem and there's a lot to say on the topic. I mean one thing I'll say is that there is a way that you can understand the campus is moving as a repeated attempt to get away from black New Yorkers. The Park Place campus became one of the largest black neighborhoods in the city and they moved to this Midtown campus which The Great Migration head turn Morningside Heights and then within a decade of that move the Great Migration had turned them into the most important black community in the world. So students have been following that story; I mentioned the student requests and students' demands to administration over the years and one of those demands has been at least a reference to Harlem on the University's own official history page. As of now the word Harlem actually does not appear anywhere on the university website. So students have followed up that story in the early 20th century looking at real estate holdings and other topics. Interesting there was an uprising in Harlem in the 1930s and students have investigated that and then really in the 1960s class that story has really been front and center during the student protests moment.

Stephanie McCurry:
And there are students this year. But I would say out of ten, at least three are working on subjects related to this. And one of the documents Thai showed them in our first visit to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library was a piece of internal correspondence from a Professor to what was it, the president of the university at the time?

Thai Jones:
Yup.

Stephanie McCurry:
Basically saying, this is what's going on on our Eastern side of our campus – there was a map and identified it, said this is where Negroes are moving to and here's the empty lots and we would be very well advised by up a certain amount of property here kind of as a buffer. I don't think he used that term but this is evidence-based, these are evidence-based projects. I mean we're not just sounding off. And of course you're sitting there and you know listening to Thai and to the students that this has to do with ongoing decisions Columbia makes about its relationship to Harlem, to Manhattanville, I mean what it that? Where did that term come from? You know I used to teach at Penn, and Penn rebranded West Philly as University City. I mean this is not this is a common pattern, so and students really very much all over this.

Audience member:
Thank you. How will your research be disseminated and shared with current students, Administration, alumni, so that we can see this incredible work? I'm a parent of three children here I don't think I've ever known about this. Just saying, a history of alumni here.

Thai S. Jones:
Thank you yeah all right I'm going to set up the website. So the project has a website and all of the student papers are available online; they're all searchable, or very soon to be searchable. So as of now the university and slavery project website has all of the resources of the project. Yeah so this is how you see it on the website and you know it's Google-able and people view the site from all over the world and

we hear from people all the time. So the papers are organized by year. So as of now that's really the main way that this information is is being shared.

Stephanie McCurry:
So we're trying to get – at events like this, maybe campus tours. There was at one point one of the students with Professor Jacoby made an app that you can use while walking around campus but we don't have the tech support. Something was no longer -- we could no longer use it. So the challenge is that Thai is a curator in the library; I'm a professor who teaches four courses a year; Professor Jacoby is. I run the undergraduate program; there's nobody whose job it is to just run this, and we're trying very hard to figure out --like we love working with each other but we're always trying to figure out who can handle this one thing and Thai ends up with the website, which is not his job, so we need to put it on a firmer footing. And this is the moment we're at; you know it's not going away. Working with the students at Columbia as a single most best the single best thing about being a professor here and we just need to connect to presidential initiative at the University which you might be hearing about, but we're the extant part of the presidential initiative, and yet you know we have yet to be fully connected to higher level operations.

Audience member:
More about I know as an alumna from a Brown University, that was a big, big deal back when Simmons made the decision back in the 80s, it was always something about Brown's involvement, it was whispered. So what I'd like I'm really interested to hear more about the decision -- what was involved in you all deciding to turn a lot of your research in the area over to the students, or what became a student perspective because I know from Brown it was more of a separate committee that worked on it for years and they did all of that research and [inaudible] that and have a wonderful combination of the monument that this is a totally different perspective research but through the student that's like really flipping it on his head. I didn't know whether you can talk.

Stephanie McCurry:
Well, Thai can probably fill you in on the real important details about how it took that shape to start with but I just quickly want to say in response to your point about the Brown report -- I was teaching at Princeton at the time and it was a blockbuster. I mean people -- you read that thing and you were reading really basically original research on the history of slavery in New England as well as you know Brown's positioning there. It's still worth reading; they've issued a new version of the report. But, you're putting your finger on something really crucial which is the action agenda of all of these committees is often to write a report. At Brown it became to establish a center where then professors are funded to do research or bring run electricity but it does not reach outwards, right? It reaches in. And we are at that point right now we don't want to do that, I mean we don't want to just end with a report, you know. I would say all of these universities and slavery projects are at the point where they have to figure out what effect they want to have in their own place. UVA has a big Monument project; Georgetown University is doing very interesting things with the descendants of a group of people who were-- Rachel Swarns at the New York Times writes a lot about this. But Thai can tell us about that decision in 2015 to go this direction.

Thai S. Jones:
Yeah, well like so many things, it was really just a result of the resources that we had. I mean, we were able to teach this course and we didn't really have access to any other option, and so it began as a necessity, but but I think our feeling is after all this time it's been a real advantage. Because there is no set end product or end date we've kept us alive now for almost ten years, whereas even at Brown, and I think the publication of the report did sort of slow the momentum of that effort to some degree, and new students have come in, and it has not kept up the vitality. So, we really liked it this has been an open-ended research initiative that has run pretty independently so far. And by far our most important accomplishment is the training of cohort after cohort of these incredible student researchers who have all gone on and brought these skills to other institutions.

Stephanie McCurry:
Tell them about Jordan. She was in the first seminar.

Thai Jones:
Jordan Brewington who I mentioned went on to found the Yale University Law School and Slavery project when she was at law school and now she just finished at year at ACLU in New Orleans where she's doing research on slave plantations and reparations. But she's just one example of dozens of students who have brought these skills to their life's work.

Stephanie McCurry:
And intellectually and politically last year, when I think about it, we did a panel last year. I can't even remember what it was. And Jordan Brewington was on it --she had just graduated from Yale Law School and had a fellowship -- with her she's working through the law, but also I think there's a there's an interesting connection in that her thinking about reparations is extremely local. She wants to work with museums and plantation museums which are across the south in the area where she grew up, or where her family is from, and so she wants -- we're a local project – the students do the research, and we talk about our own campus, and she has replicated that on maybe even more important scale about a particular area – in Mississippi, right?

Thai Jones:
Louisiana.

Stephanie McCurry:
Louisiana. She's so impressive and so in many ways we don't we don't need a center we want them to go and do their work which, you know as long as the academy survives for them to go to in the humanities.

Audience member:
This is really fabulous and I think it's great that you guys are doing all this work. I think it's kind of sad that so much of it has fallen on so few people, right? Just two staff members and a handful of students? And where is the university funding to underwrite the expansion, the outward looking promulgation of these stories? And I don't --please forgive me, but I live in Princeton, and they've done a really amazing job in highlighting African American history on the Princeton campus. There's an audio tour that you can listen to on your phone; there are parks and statues, and all sorts of things and beat the system by the

university, with university money. This is not done by the students or in the spare time of already beleaguered staff members, so where is the University support for this project? Excuse me.

Thai S. Jones:
Great question!

Stephanie McCurry:
If you write a letter, we'll put it up next year. You'll be on the screen, or maybe sitting up here – that's something you did. I mean look, these are -- I mean like I don't care, you know, I'm tenured, I'm a full professor at Columbia, I can say whatever I want. I also don't hold Princeton as the be-all and end-all of equality, but of money? Yes. So we hear constantly about the difference between the money they have available to do things with. But that you're quite right and I think we are -- we have recently stood up for ourselves and we're trying to say, you can't launch a new initiative without building in and connecting to the one part of that that already exists, and is successful. So we are fighting in this polite, academic kind of way, but we're kind of tough; like they can't get rid of us, and the students -- as always, students who want to be in the seminar. I mean unless you write an honors thesis, which is a year-long process you're not going to get this kind of curated, intensive research experience in any way. You know you can't just walk into any seminar and get that. So but I really appreciate -- we really appreciate your comment and maybe this is another advantage of doing this today, is that the outreach builds outreach but we are very much trying to figure out the community part. And we need a person who is dedicated to that, to public history, to community institution-building, and connection building. We've wanted that for a number of years and we just have to figure out how to get the line as they say around here.

Audience member:
Hi, my name is Michelle, and I'm here with my nephew, who's a first year student. [Applause]

Stephanie McCurry: All right!

Audience member (Michelle):
I wanted to thank you all for this amazing talk and research—congratulations, and thank you so much. I am a University of Virginia alum, and I worked at Harvard University archives for 14 years I have seen some of the documents; I worked with the faculty; I was in reference so I actually showed them the records I'm looking at -- the list and the Bursar's Office people paying for tuition with rum, sugar, and the Confederates, I could go on. Anyway, I just wanted to mention that what her question was about, what we do in making sure that this Legacy continues and Community is the alumni. I can tell you, Harvard yes has largest endowment bigger than some of you know national countries combined, but the alumni? Yes that is your key, that is your key and the oral history program. That's it I just wanted to give you the answer.

Stephanie McCurry:
Well these guys are going to be our alumni, as of next May. And we don't need your money – we need you to pressure other people. Thank you – it sounds amazing the work you were doing the archives. They were literally paying with like rum instead of dollars?

Audience member (Michelle): [inaudible]

Stephanie:
Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know.

Audience member:
I think this is fantastic. I'm an educator in Connecticut and Connecticut has gone a long way. We now have an African American History course that's required – a whole one. It's pretty good. But this -- all of this, like you said it's going inward, and then we're going outward with people and it's like the pebbles in the pool, the ripples. It's fantastic, but how do we get it even further when people are -- they do not understand, even if they read the small articles, of what it took an hour of four highly educated people and people learning more and researching and I I know this much more than I did instead of reading you know an article, three columns. That the fact that all the wealth was built this way, the fact the generational wealth was denied people, and instead of all why don't people just work hard? Oh yeah that's great thanks for that one. I mean how do we how do we get this out there? I work in Hartford Connecticut, and it's just a wonderful, diverse population and it's what we focus on. I work with an organization that works with equity, on all kinds, on all fronts. And I'm just fascinated by this, I love this, thank you, and I just think how do we get it – all the students coming through here will be getting it, all the alumni will be getting it, what about everybody else? Cause that's, that's where it has to get to. But thank you.

Anne Mesquita:
Sorry, I just want to comment that there is also a group on campus including Administration, and the Vice Provost and University Librarian, who couldn't be here today because she is sick, but was really sorry to miss it, but looking at Buildings and Markers, and it's with many professors on campus and the Provost is involved and the people care very deeply about this issue, and I feel like this ties into it a bit, thinking about representation. Anyway, another question?

Audience member:
Hi, I'm also a History student, a senior working on [inaudible] some and the south and I'm just curious, in the instances of where there was mention of runaway slave ads in the area by students, is that from students who had brought slaves with them to the university? And so in terms of like lodging if there was like slaves quarters in the dormitories that was like segregated off into different floors or if that was like within the same unit right next door? I'm just for whoever.

Thai S. Jones:
Yeah, thank you for that question. So, you know this one student, Jordan, you know what she did was she searched every name of every student, faculty, and trustee for a 50 year period. Which may sound daunting, it may not, but you know this was a time when there was maybe eight students in the whole college each year for all that period. So it was manageable. So like for the idea of how you scale your project, she looked at everything – something finite. Kings College was not a residential college, so it didn't have dorms in the way that we think of. In fact I don't think that there were any dorms until the move to Morningside. But we do know, ok, so of those 44 people, you know many of them were students but many of the ads were posted after they had graduated, so when they were little bit older in life. So really the one enslaved person that we know lived on campus was owned by George Washington's son- stepson, Custis, Jacky Custis, who was who was on campus as a student for a year or two and then dropped out. And they made a special accommodation for his slave named Joe to live on

campus. We also know that the first president of Kings College, Samuel Johnson, for whom Johnson Hall was named. He enslaved maybe 20 people in the course of his life, including while he was president. So there certainly were people on campus in houses in the orbit of students. Kings College was in the heart of black New York at that time. The ward where it was had the largest black population in the city, so Kings College students were in a diverse world. But we do not have the records to show exactly who was on campus at that time.

Stephanie McCurry:
You can see -- I think your question's great, and if you work on the south you probably realize the difference, right? Like we know that black men and women provided heavy labor and domestic service for households all over New York, Brooklyn, whatever, but we don't have the records as Thai said, but so you can see for example at the University of Virginia project is a big emphasis on space and architecture because they lack records of another sort but they can use the architecture and excavation to show how many black people were on campus and how many affiliated businesses were renting the labor of enslaved people to provide you know those things.

The other thing I just want to say for the sake of amusement and entertainment is one of the things the students and me, to some extent, learned when we read about the very early history of Columbia, of Kings College is, guess what age students were when they went to King's College in the middle of the eighteenth century? 13, 14 years old. And so like nothing is stable. That's why I love being historian --like to be a student at a university student? Okay but what's a university, what's a college? So they're completely flipped. We're all completely flummoxed. You can't just think it's like now, but in the 18th century. It's not, and there's so many cool things about teaching them. Like it's an Anglican College and you can just see the confusion across students' faces. They don't care what one kind of Protestant compared to another kind of Protestant. Like are they Jewish, are they Muslim, that might – but Catholics or Anglicans versus Presbyterians like what they end up swimming around in these deep waters. But that was that was that was surprising to everybody, that these are basically teenagers and it's essentially a boarding school but there's no -- there must be women making their living probably boarding them, but yeah it's it's another world another world. The 18th century was another world.

Anne Mesquita:
I'm told we're at time, but I want to remind people to please visit the Rare Book and Manuscript Library upstairs on the 6th floor. You're welcome there; there are incredible exhibits there now. And thank you!