

# Erased: Columbia University and Patterns of Abuse of Black Women

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Maya Zundel discusses Erased: Columbia University and Patterns of Abuse of Black Women: [video] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ldW\\_t0l0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ldW_t0l0g)

Perhaps the earliest documented example of sexism at Columbia dates back to a comic created by a student in 1766. This comic depicts a Patrick Cornell Pagan, a well-known pseudonym among the student body for Professor Stephen Harpur.[1] While the comic was allegedly confiscated from students, its implications for the example set by the professor cannot be as easily erased.[2] In the comic Patrick Cornell Pagan seduces a Miss Myng with beer. He says, “You need not fear, Mistress, the Juice is really weak and simple.” This results in a sexual interaction of doubtful consent. Later, Miss Myng comes to Patrick Pagan pregnant and he pays a doctor £20 to force her to get an abortion. He explicitly says to the doctor, “Doctor this is for you if you will make her abortive.”[3] Allegations of forced abortion would be scandalous today, much less in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As this unfortunate woman has a forced

abortion she says, “Oh no, this pale faced man has ruined me.”[4] This comic is disconcerting and disturbing in the modern day, and caused quite a stir in 1766. As a result, Professor Harpur retired in 1767. However, this was by no means the end of his career at Columbia. He became a tutor and then governor and trustee.[5] There is humor in this comic if read through the sexist and outdated boys-will-be-boys lens. However a feminist reading sees this as indicative of student perceptions of appropriate treatment of women through an example set by professors. The fact that Professor Harpur and his non-consensual affairs did not lead to his termination, but in fact to his upward mobility in the university is indicative of Columbia’s historic willingness to turn a blind eye, if not reward, horrific treatment of women.

History erases women frequently and effortlessly. The institutions in charge of canonizing history perpetrate this to protect their own public image, creating the perception that history without women amounts to focusing on the “important” parts.[6] The accepted historical record makes it almost impossible to trace the lives of marginalized women, especially black women and sex workers.[7] Feminist theory provides a lens to push back on this erasure. Taking existing primary and secondary sources and reading them against the grain begins to reveal the history of erased women. Looking at these sources, not through the intention of the author, but with a critical eye, allows feminist historians to fill in the empty spaces with the women left out of history.[8] Columbia University’s tells its history without women, with the rare exception of upper class white women.[9] In this paper I examine primarily the Governor’s minutes of King’s College, property ownership records of John R. Livingston, and City of New York Coroner’s Records to illuminate the ways in which King’s College and Columbia University affiliates used and abused

women, especially black women, for profit and pleasure and then erased from the record for the sake of public perception.

The founders of King's College, now Columbia University, began with the ideal of creating a space of learning and education. In 1749, William Livingston wrote *Some Serious Thoughts on the Design of Erecting a College in the Providence of New York*. He detailed the benefits of having a college to educate young men and prevent them from becoming unruly. Though he eventually became opposed to the creation of King's College, Livingston's paper sparked the idea for a college that would cater specifically to turning the young men of elite families into gentlemen.[10] Samuel Johnson was first president and professor of the college created under royal charter in 1754. After a period of closure during the Revolutionary War, the college reopened under the name Columbia College.[11] In all discussion of the founding of the college, providing a place to educate and refine young men is the ultimate goal.[12] These dreams of orderly King's College Students did not come to fruition.

There is ample evidence of student disregard for proper treatment of women in the Governor's Minutes, beginning with March 1, 1763.[13] These minutes state, "It is resolved that no women on any pretense whatever (Except a Cook) be allowed to reside within the College for the future, and those who are now there be removed as conveniently as may be." [14] This statement explicitly bans King's College students from keeping women on campus, with the exception of the cook employed by the college. This led to the construction of fences around the perimeter of King's College.[15]

Traditionally, this was read as evidence of the value King's College placed on the education of young men. However, read against the grain, as with all things banned, this demonstrates that the college considered the way

students were bringing women onto campus inappropriate. If students were engaging with women in an entirely respectful way there would have been no need to ban women from the campus and no fear of parent and public outrage. While one can only speculate as to what exactly this behavior entailed, it in some instances must have resembled Professor Harpur's.

Shortly after the Governors banned women from campus, on June 3, 1763 they banned students from visiting brothels.[16] These minutes state, "None of the Pupils shall frequent houses of ill Fame or keep Company with any persons of known scandalous behavior, and such that may endanger either their Principles or Morals; and those that do shall first be openly rebuked, and if they obstinately persist in it they shall be expelled." [17] As with the other Governor's minutes, it is evident from this rule that students were visiting brothels in high enough numbers to necessitate a ban on this behavior. The unequal power dynamics are evident here. All students attending King's College would have been very affluent, while women working in brothels would have been at a distinct economic disadvantage at the very least, making consent in these interactions doubtful.[18] This however is not one of the Governors' concerns. They care only for the image of the college. While students were purportedly held to higher standards than these "persons of scandalous behavior" – though the faculty, such as Stephen Harpur, did not demonstrate this – it is evident that students were engaging in behavior that would embarrass the university if widely publicized. The fact that the students were engaging in nonconsensual relationships with women under economic pressures does not cross the Governors minds as a concern.

Bad behavior was notorious among King's College students, throughout the years the Governors banned all forms of gambling and set fines for slandering and maiming other people.[19] All of these rules demonstrate the rampant

misbehavior among King's College students. While these bans mandate the expulsion or severe punishment of students that violate these rules, students were infrequently if ever held to these standards. *The Black Book of King's College* chronicles punishments of students in violation of the rules. One entry in particular details the lack of punishment students received. A student named Robinson attacked a cook – though the male pronouns are used here it is possible the cook was black or a woman or both given the parentheticals in the previous Governor's minutes. Robinson's punishment was solely confinement within the boundaries of King's College for two weeks.[20] The lack of specificity as to the race and gender of this cook is representative of the larger historical trend of silencing the experiences of working-class people, women, free blacks and slaves. Robinson, in contrast, went on to become a Trustee of the college.[21] This account demonstrates that punishment of students was not proportionate to crimes. Robinson threatened the basic physical safety of an individual at a distinct socioeconomic disadvantage to himself. Those in charge of discipline at the college were far more concerned about the influx of money from the Robinson family than the safety of their employees. They clearly indulged student misbehavior, particularly when directed at minorities and women. This indulgence directly violates both the founding ideals of the college, and also any sort of moral decency. It places students above working class people and teaches these young men that they will not receive punishment for their actions because of who they are. This privilege and entitlement is destructive, yet King's College taught it just as much as grammar or physics. Simply drawing from four documents it is evident that from the founding of King's College, students mistreated women and the administration indulged this behavior. These sources simply scrape the surface of the concealed history of Columbia and its indulgence of mistreatment of women and minorities by the student body. Just short of a

century after the founding of King's College it had become Columbia College and an important part of life in New York.

The pattern of mistreatment of women and minorities is only further revealed in the history of the Livingston family and their ownership of brothels. Shortly after the Governors banned women from campus, Robert R. Livingston, nephew of the previously mentioned William Livingston, graduated from King's College in 1764. He went on to co-write the Declaration of Independence and serve as Chancellor of New York.[22] The Livingston family is one of Columbia's most important families. In 1979, Columbia University changed the name of Livingston Hall to Wallach Hall. Robert R. Livingston remained involved in the college after his graduation and presumably donated money to his alma mater. Some of this money came from the enormous investments he and his brother, John R. Livingston, made in brothels in the early 1800s.

Brothels were a substantial source of income. They were also a source of controversy. Abolition was fiercely debated in New York City in the early 1800s. One of the most successful arguments that the pro-slavery factions used was the idea that abolition, gradual or otherwise, would lead to interracial sex and marriage. White people perceived this as an enormous threat to their wellbeing.[23] New York enacted gradual emancipation in 1817, with all slave supposedly freed in 1827.[24] However, the debate over interracial interactions and sex raged on, particularly in the Five Points district. New Yorkers in the 1800s considered Five Points to be the center of vice.[25] Five Points was one of the few places in the city where white people, predominantly new Irish immigrants, and black people lived together. Anti-abolitionists looked upon the interracial neighborhood with nothing less than horror. [26] Their outrage did not stop with emancipation. A huge number of riots took place over this issue in the 1830s with white people storming into

these neighborhoods to attempt to spread fear and root out imagined interracial reactions.[27] In reaction to this, all but the most radical and privileged abolitionists moved away from advocating for interracial social relations.[28]

While there were likely the occasional romantic interracial relations, these are largely un-documented. Nevertheless, there is evidence of interracial sex taking place in brothels. This occurred both between black female sex workers and white men, and white female sex workers and black men. The former occurred in higher numbers due to the danger inherent for all parties in the latter.[29] Since slavers brought the first slaves to America, Americans saw black people, men and women alike, as inherently and obsessively sexual. Stemming from this created two damaging, inaccurate and persistent perceptions about black men and women. The first manifested as a prevailing fear among white people that black men would rape white women. White people perceived black men to be constantly searching for a sexual partner and would stop at nothing to satisfy their needs. White women rarely admitted to having consensual sexual relationships with black men. If they did, white society shunned them.[30] Black women were also seen as inherently sexual beings. White people believed that black women always wanted sex; therefore it was impossible for them not to consent. This was justification for the rampant history of white men raping black female slaves. If, in rare cases, black women attempted to receive justice for rape at the hands of a white man, she was never taken seriously.[31] Even though New York City had abolished slavery by this time, it would be naïve to assume that these relations did not involve unequal power dynamics that would prevent these interactions from being consensual, especially while taking place in brothels.

From 1820-1859 the Livingston family owned many brothels in the Five Points area. From 1820-1829 they managed 16 properties on Anthony St.[32] John R. Livingston, owned the majority of these brothels, though Robert R. Livingston owned 154 Anthony St. through this decade.[33] The census lists three black women and one black man as living at 147 Anthony St. in 1820 under the name Hannah Lewis.[34] While it is difficult to state definitively in what capacity these women and man worked in the Livingston brothel, it is likely that these black women were sex workers. While the Livingston brothers would not have been managing the day-to-day business of the brothel, they consented to and profited off of the brothel by intentionally renting to known madams, often doing business with the same women for decades, and charging high prices for properties in an otherwise undesirable neighborhood. John R. Livingston was notorious for his business savvy and low morals, and would not have made these investments if they did not offer huge returns.[35]

On Chapel St. throughout the 1820s the Livingston family owned one side of the street on a block of brothels, four properties in total.[36] One black woman lived in 76 Chapel St. with four black men according to the census in 1820 under the name Peter Vandyke.[37] While it is difficult to know in what capacity they worked, the census records black people, including women, living at these brothels. While it is not definite they were working a particular fetishized market, they were participating in the sex work industry at an even further disadvantage of power than white women who also did so.[38]

John R. Livingston owned five properties on Orange St. that are only recorded for the single year of 1826.[39] There is no census data for these years and no clear reason as to why John R. Livingston bought and sold these properties within the span of a year. He owned an additional six properties throughout the decade on Thomas St.[40] This brings the total for the decade



to an incredible 27 individual brothel properties. No records list black women as living in these properties on Thomas St. or Orange St., however the vast majority of brothels employed black women as maids for the white sex workers that lived in these buildings, making it likely that there were black women employed in these buildings who did not live in them.[41]

Business continued to boom for the Livingston family on Anthony St. throughout the 1830s. They owned seven properties at various points. Columbia's esteemed Robert R. Livingston owned 152 Anthony St., again drawing a direct connection to the ways Columbia profited off of the bodies of women.[42]

However, this decade was not as peaceful as the last. A series of attacks made their properties on Anthony St. sites of violence. On February 11, 1834, a John Phillips attacked Margaret A. Roberts, presumably a sex worker employed at 24 Anthony St.[43] While mob attacks were more common during this decade, the attack by just one man is no less traumatizing, and perhaps an indication that sexual assault occurred.[44] On March 14, 1834, Townsend Pearsall, a mariner, attacked Mary Ann Grovenor, presumably a sex worker, at 26 Anthony St. Pearsall was a repeated attacker of sex workers, yet there is no definitive evidence that the New York City government took steps to prevent him from attacking more women, demonstrating the apathy of the government towards sex workers.[45] On December 25, 1839 Mary Ann Misner, presumably another sex worker, was at 24 Anthony St. A gang of men, five named along with "others unknown," attacked her.[46] Attacks on sex workers in the Five Points area were unfortunately common at the time. Frequently gangs attacked sex workers who were known to have relations with clients of another race. While it is impossible to know definitively the

circumstances that led to this attack, it is important to know the potential racial motivations.[47]

As evident by the countless dismissals of black women's reports of sexual or physical violence, most people reporting an attack were likely white. Most attacks against black women went unreported. Law in the United States historically dictated that slaves and free black people could not testify in court. This caused countless rapes against black women by abusive white men to go unreported and unpunished.[48] Though the state government had abolished these laws, the precedent for dismissal of black women's testimonies, coupled with the prevailing idea that they always wanted sex, amounted to considerable barriers to justice.[49]

Other streets do not have reported attacks. John R. Livingston owned three properties on Chapel St thorough the 1830s that do not have any records of violence.[50] Interestingly at 76 Chapel St., the census lists six black men living in this property with eight black women under the name Peter Vandyke.[51] The city directory entries for 40½ Thomas St. list many young black men working as waiters, physicians, and laborers.[52] It is difficult to know in exactly what capacity these young men were employed within the brothel. It is difficult to know in exactly what capacity the brothel employed these young men. The high number of black women living in the brothel on Chapel St. indicates that may have been a brothel exclusively worked by black sex workers, carrying implications of fetishization of black bodies. The image of black women as Jezebels was particularly salient during this time period. The stereotype of the Jezebel comes from the wife of King Ahab in the Bible. Jezebels are inherently promiscuous women, governed only by their sexual desires, willing to lead men astray. This stereotype of black women carries with it fetishization by white men who saw all black women as erotic

and taboo sexual objects.[53] If these black women were indeed sex workers it is impossible that the Livingston profits off of their labor would not also be profits from the fetishization of black women.

The Livingston family properties branched out to other streets in the 1830s. While they had briefly owned 60 Cross St. in 1828, they acquired it for the decade of the 1830s. Additionally, in 1832 they bought four properties on Cross St. for the single year.[54] While there is not a census record for the tenants managing 60 Cross St. through the decade, it is interesting to note that an abbreviated version of John R. Livingston's name, Jno. R. Livingston is listed as the owner of the property.[55] This could have been simply a clerical error or a strange attempt to mask his ownership. Furthermore, John R. Livingston owned property sporadically on Orange St. in the 1830s. From 1833-1837 he owned two properties. While in 1830, he owned 42 Orange St. for only one year.[56] The city directory lists the tenant at 42 Orange St. in 1830 as James M'Swegen, an unusual last name to be sure, however there is no corresponding census record.[57]

Thomas St. continued to be a source of profit for the Livingston Family. They owned three properties bringing their total for the year to an impressive 21, only a slight decrease from the previous decade.[58] The census record for 39 Thomas St. under the tenet Mary Wall's name indicates that five white woman lived with one black women. It is most likely that the black woman listed in the census worked as a maid for the brothel, as was the custom at the time. However, given the nature of sexual violence, it is safe to assume that that position wouldn't be one without perils.[59]

41 Thomas St., one of the Livingston properties, carries with it some historical significance as it was the site of the murder of Helen Jewett, a well-known sex

worker, in 1836. Sarah Dunscombe, her black maid was one of the key witnesses in the subsequent murder trial. When she appeared before the grand jury she made a mistake in her testimony due to her fear. During the trial, the defense used this depict her as an unintelligent black girl and discredit her testimony.[60] This trial was very significant because it was the first sensationalized murder trial in the United States and ended in an unjust acquittal.[61] In spite of the publicity, the Livingston family were not criticized or punished in any way for owning brothels that were sites of such violence. While many reformers demanded the owner of 41 Thomas St. make himself known, John R. Livingston did not reveal that he was the owner of this property; nor did the city government reveal who owned the property, another protection of the wealthiest in the city.[62] Other people took the fall for John R. Livingston. Rosalind Thompson, a previously respected madam and proprietor of 41 Thomas St., lost her reputation while testifying during the trial to public shame and harassment. In spite of the fact that Thompson had worked loyally for John R. Livingston for over two decades, he did nothing to save her ruined livelihood.[63] The protection of the Livingston family during the trial and the lack of consequences for owning a dangerous brothel demonstrates the ways in which money and power protects those that have it, allowing Columbia to continue to benefit from their profits.

The Livingston family's brothels are not recorded in full for the 1840s. This was likely due to the population density given the recent influx of Irish immigrants without corresponding expansion of health services, leading to greater spread of illness and disease.[64] In the records of brothel owners, the years 1840-1849 are missing. There are only two property listings found for the decade.[65] One corresponding census entry simply lists four white women living there, probably as sex workers.[66] The entry for 76 Chapel St.,

listed under Ann Miller, is unusual. It lists five white women of ages ranging from childhood to elderly living with three black men under the age of 25.[67] Given the rampant racism of the 1840s, and the violence directed against mixed race living arrangements, this listing is more than a little unusual, particularly for a brothel.

By 1850 brothels was no longer the booming business they had been for the Livingston family earlier in the century. John R. Livingston died in 1852 so the properties that were not leased for the decade likely expired.[68] He owned only two properties on Chapel St.[69] There is an utter lack of documentation for these properties. The 1850 city directory has no listings for these properties and subsequently it is impossible to search the census records for them. Strangely, the Livingston family acquired a property on Greene St. for only one year, 1850.[70] While John Livingston owned all other mentioned brothels, with the exceptions of those owned by Robert R. Livingston, Cornelia Livingston owned this one.[71] It is unclear what relation Cornelia Livingston was to the Livingston family; she does not appear in any immediate family trees. Cornelia was a family name but there was no living Cornelia Livingston in 1850. [72] If she did exist, the Livingston family may have put the property in her name to poorly mask the relation to the family. John R Livingston owned two additional properties on Thomas St.[73] The total for the century was a relatively low five.

What is evident through all of these decades of brothel ownership is that the Livingston family owned and profited from an astonishing number of brothels. These brothels were not only sites of subjection for the woman that worked there, black or white, but for the black men employed as servants. There are no records for these people and it is unlikely that there ever was; consequently, it is impossible to identify the black women at these properties

that were servants and those that were sex workers. Furthermore, many of these women, whether sex workers or domestic servants, were likely former slaves, and even if they were not, the power dynamics of the time dictate that they were certainly not able to argue for their rights. It is unlikely that brothel proprietors or clients treated or paid these women of color well given their lack of power.[74]

It is also clear that these brothels were sites of violence in the sheer number of recorded attacks in the area. As is the case now, black women were less likely to report attacks because courts would not believe their testimony. Sarah Dunscombe's experience in testifying and the events of Whistelo trial prove this. In this case a black man and then by a white man raped a young black woman named Lucy Williams. She was adamant that the father of her child was the black man due to the nature of the sexual contact that had occurred between her and the white man. However, the jury did not believe her because of the assumptions they made based on her race. Many of Columbia's most prominent professors were expert witnesses in this trial.[75] There is a long history of black women seen as hypersexual. They were not seen as subjects, just objects perceived as always wanting sex.[76] Black women continued to be subject to the sexual whims of men without an option for ensuring their own safety after the end of slavery.

While Columbia University preached virtue and promised to turn the young men it took in into gentlemen, much of the money from one of Columbia's most prominent families came from profiting off the bodies of women, in particular, women of color. King's College and its students sanctioned the violence against women endemic in New York City. This violence remains present in Columbia's legacy; no matter how much the university has overlooked or erased the past.

Before Columbia's endowment and significant contributors of questionable morality, before even the founding of King's College, New York City was a site of violence without justice for many white sex workers, black women, and black men. The City of New York Coroner's Records detail all the cases the coroner oversaw from 1748 to 1758.[77] In this record are 87 total reports on deceased persons. The percentage distribution of these reports based on demographics is telling of the priorities of the time. 66 of the 87 reports are on the deaths of white men, 75% of the total entries.[78] A mere seven of the 87 reports detail married, widowed, or spinster white women, or female children, 8% of the entries.[79] An additional four of the 87 entries discuss unmarried white women whose unmarried status, lack of family and age implies they were sex workers, a mere 5% of the entries, bringing the total for white women to 13%.[80] There are ten entries of black persons in the coroner's book, five for women, and five for men; a total of 10% of the entries and a mere 5% each when split based on gender.[81]

While it is not stated explicitly in the coroner's report that these white women were sex workers, it is sound to hypothesize these women were due to their young age, and absence of family, or marital status.[82] All other women mentioned in the book are identified in relation to their surviving family members. The absence of these indicators of propriety is evident in all the entries of presumed sex workers. These women in their deaths were not treated with nearly the same care as their married counterparts, receiving only the most cursory inquests to determine that they had died of natural or unavoidable accident.

The coroner examined the first white female sex worker, Sarah Fisher, on January 22, 1747. He viewed her in the house of Hugh Crawford in South Ward who appears to be of no relation. She committed suicide by hanging

herself. The report deems her “of sound mind,” meaning she was not buried in a Christian cemetery.[83] There are ample implications here as to the circumstances sex workers lived under that would drive a young woman to suicide. The next deceased sex worker was Maria Slyter. The coroner viewed her body in City Hall, indicating that her death was completely handled by the city, on June 3, 1756. She died “suddenly”.[84] This is clearly a euphemism and could refer to any number of suspicious circumstances, including sexually transmitted illnesses. Further indicating that she was a sex worker is her list of witnesses: Susannah Simpson, Anne Davis, Eliza Marshall, Mary Younge, Anne Buckley, Richard Ayscough, and John Jones. [85] The apparent unmarried nature of all these people, and the long list of women who witnessed her demise suggest that she may have been living in a brothel at the time of her death. More than a year later came the inquest of Jane Lightfoot on June 8, 1757. The coroner viewed her body in the house of a stranger, Philip Kissick, in the West Ward. She drowned in the East River.[86] Similar to this is the death of Johanna Casebold. The coroner viewed her body on December 21, 1757 in the North Ward.[87] She died of an “illness”, again, possibly a euphemism for a disease contracted in her work.

In spite of the fact that these women were white and made quite a bit of money, they did not receive full inquests, unlike their white and married counterparts. If the circumstances of their deaths were suspicious in any way there is no record of this in the coroner’s notes and the deaths were not investigated. If this is the treatment that white women who worked in brothels received, one can make anticipate the horrific neglect that black men and women received from the coroner.

There are only five black men listed in the coroner’s reports. The first inquest was for a John on June 6, 1748. The coroner viewed his body in the house of



James Ackland in the East Ward in spite of the fact that he was a slave of John Pinhorn. He drowned falling out of boat.[88] While this appears to have been fairly common cause of death at the time, there was no inquest to investigate if this was in fact simply an accident or if it was a murder or a suicide. The next male listed in the records was an infant of a woman named Isabella. The coroner viewed the infant's body in City Hall on August 20, 1749. Isabella strangled her infant.[89] While there is nothing in the coroner's report to indicate this, the infant may have been the product of rape leading to her to kill her own child. Infanticide was much more common among slaves and free black women at this time than many would like to believe, especially in cases where women had babies as the product of rape.[90] The next record is for Samuell Bull from June 29, 1756. His body was also viewed in a house of James Ackland's, like John, except this time in the South Ward. Samuell Bull was a free black man who drowned in a sinking ship.[91] While this again appears to be a fairly common cause of death at the time, it is impossible to know if the coroner examined this death as thoroughly as he should have. Following Samuell Bull's death came recorded death of Andries Gush on November 23, 1756, viewed at the house of Nicholas Bayard. The coroner viewed the body here because Andries Gush was a slave to Bayard. He committed suicide with a gun, "not being of sound mind".[92] This indicates he could be buried in a Christian cemetery. It is impossible to separate suicide from the circumstances of someone's life, therefore it is reasonable to assume that Andries Gush killed himself because he could not go on living in the servitude of Bayard. The last black man in the coroner's report is an unknown black man viewed in the Dock Ward March 20, 1758. He could have been a freeman or slave; the circumstances under which he drowned are unclear.[93] There was very little investigative work done into who this man was or what

caused his death because his status as a black man made him unworthy of investigation in the eyes of the coroner.

All of these men were in positions of servitude or had been at some point in their life. The violence inherent in slavery led to the death of many, while the rest drowned under circumstances that were not investigated. It is easy to infer from this a pattern of violence against black men and the subsequent neglect on the part of the state to look into their deaths fully.

There are five black women listed in the coroner's reports. The first is Isabella, the mother who strangled her infant. The coroner viewed her body in City Hall on September 19, 1749. She died while in jail for the murder of her "bastard" child.[94] This record notes that she was a servant to Daniell Shatford. As previously mentioned, infanticide was unfortunately fairly common among black women who had infants as the products of rape, often at the hands of the people they worked for. This record notes that she was a "Free Molatto", creating implications of her own potential fathers. There are two witnesses listed in this case, a John Van Bueren and a James Mills.[95] These witnesses were only required as she died in jail while technically under the state's care. It is unclear if she committed suicide or if she died from neglect on behalf of the jail. It is evident that no matter what happened, her status as a black woman, a servant and a murderess deemed her death unworthy of investigation.

After Isabella comes an unknown person viewed in the house of Andries Hopper in the Out Ward on June 14, 1756.[96] The gender and race of this person is not specified, yet the coroner specified their race and gender of other unknown persons found dead.[97] This either indicates that the body was in such a state of decay that this basic information was unidentifiable or

that the coroner did not consider the deceased person important. If the latter was the case they were likely poor, and may have been black, and/or a woman.

The next note is that of a black woman named Cate. It is important to note that this case is not numbered and did not receive an inquest. The coroner took notes October 6, 1757 though it is unclear when she died. She was a slave of a David Van Horne. Similar to Andries Gush she committed suicide, though not with a gun, but through “self-strangulation”.<sup>[98]</sup> It is unclear why a case that would raise any reasonable coroner’s suspicion went uninvestigated without even so much as an inquest. The only reasonable response being that the intersection of racism, sexism, and deference to men of power led to this woman’s death remaining uninvestigated.

Another entry for a black female took place on September 4, 1758 with a black “bastard” child viewed in the house of George Burns in South Ward. This child was stillborn to a slave of William Hyer. The woman’s name is not mentioned.<sup>[99]</sup> As was the case with Isabella and her child, it is possible that this baby was the product of William Hyer’s rape of this unnamed slave woman.

The last mention of a black woman in the report comes with the deposition into the death of a Phillis. The deposition took place October 22, 1758. She was a slave to a tailor named Louder/Lowder – spelled both ways in the deposition.<sup>[100]</sup> This is perhaps the most horrifying of all the cases in the record. Phillis had attempted to poison Louder. While her reasons for wanting to do so are not mentioned in the deposition, it is not difficult to infer that it was due to the mistreatment she received at the hands of Louder. As punishment for her actions, Louder forced her to eat food filled with maggots

and then starved her until she died.[101] This is a despicable and disturbing murder and went unpunished.[102] It provides salient evidence that the murders of black women were not considered important by the city structure, creating a pattern of violence and neglect for slave women.

All of these women with known circumstances of their murder ended up dead for trying to protect themselves while in positions of servitude. It is horrifying to think that these women who suffered so much in their natural lives were not even given the right of justice in their death.

There are a few connections between these discussed cases and Columbia. There are several names of people in the jury or otherwise involved in the inquests that were later affiliated with King's College or Columbia. One of the jurors in the case of Samuel Bull in 1756 was potentially the father of Columbia Graduate, Gerard Beekman. According to the Index of Graduates he graduated from King's College in 1766.[103] A juror in the case of John in 1748 was William Johnson who served as a Tutor in 1755 at King's College.[104] The son of one of the jurors in Jane Lightfoot's inquest in 1757 attended King's College. Edward Nicoll, possibly the father of a man who completed his Graduate of the Arts from King's College in 1766.[105] He was possibly related to Benjamin Nicoll, stepson of King's College founder Samuel Johnson.[106] In the case of Maria Slyter in 1756 a John Jones was an M.D. and Rheims, Prof. Surg. from 1767 to 1776, and then an Honorary Graduate in 1768.[107] The last juror in the death of an unknown person, who was possibly a black woman in 1756, was Benjamin Moore. He was heavily involved in Columbia; he received his Graduate of the Arts in 1768, then becoming President under Royal Charter from 1775 to 1776, the President under New Charter from 1801 to 1811, lastly he became a Professor of Rhetoric and Logic from 1784 to 1787.[108] It is hard to know definitively that

these are the same people who served on the jury and later had connections to King's College and Columbia College. However, the alignment of the dates and the uncommon nature of some of their names makes it more likely than not. If indeed these are the same people it demonstrates an utter complacency in the deaths and unjust inquests of disadvantaged people.

In spite of these potential connections to King's College, the coroner's report mainly serves to demonstrate the violence against the bodies of marginalized people that was endemic to New York. King's College built itself in an environment that considered the bodies of sex workers and black people to be worth less than other human life. The students of King's College were doubtless deeply affected by this despicable treatment of marginalized people. They would have learned that they were worth more than black people and sex workers and carried this lesson with them for the rest of their lives, affecting the way they would go on to treat all others around them.

Columbia has worked long and hard to forget the more unsavory aspects of its past and cultivate an image of progressive politics and student activism. However, it is never possible to fully scrub one's hands of the crimes of the past. Columbia has consistently put women, especially black women, in a position of inferiority and servitude from its founding days as King's College. This reverberates into the present and, unless addressed, has severe implications for the future. While Columbia does not intentionally model its policies on the treatment of women and minorities on its actions of the past, it is possible to see the parallels between the treatment of women in cases of sexual assault and violence on campuses and the complacency of the university's treatment of minorities. Victims of sexual assault at Columbia and all other universities are still often silenced or discredited. It is rare at Columbia University that survivors of sexual assault see their attacker

punished. The university ignores the complaints and issues of minorities as the concerns of African Americans connected with Columbia. In spite of well-organized black students with comprehensive improvements for the school, Columbia refuses to act. Without a doubt these circumstances are different and the times have changed, however, the university refuses to acknowledge the mistakes it has made in the past. It therefore cannot learn or grow from them. If Columbia University continues to refuse to acknowledge its legacy of mistreatment of women and people of color, it is doubtful that things will ever change for the better.

## Endnotes

[1] See Figure 1

[2] Comic on Stephen Harpur. In "Columbia College Papers" Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Craig Wilder. *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 11.

[7] There has been considerable debate among historians about the usage of prostitute or sex worker. I have chosen to use sex worker here because it connotes more respect towards these women and serves as an umbrella term for all the types of sex work these women were potentially employed in; by force, economic necessity or choice.

[8] John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1972),13.

[9] Robert McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003),163.

[10] McCaughey, 10.

[11] Ibid., 48.

[12] Ibid.,14

[13] See Figure 2

[14] 1 March 1763 in “Minutes of the Governor’s of King’s College” vol. 1, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[15] Wilder, 142.

[16] See Figure 3

[17] 23 April 1763 in “Minutes of the Governor’s of King’s College” vol. 1, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[18] Patricia Cohen. *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 53.

[19] Wilder, 142.

[20] See Figure 4

[21] Wilder, 142.

[22] McCaughey, 41

[23] Leslie Harris. “From Abolitionist Amalgamators to ‘Rulers of the Five Points’: The Discourse of Interracial Sex and Reform in Antebellum New York City”. In *Sex, Love, and Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. M. Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 191.

[24] Leslie Harris. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1662-1863*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 72.

[25] Christine Stansell. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*. (New York: Alpert A. Knopf, 1968), .

[26] Harris, “From Abolitionist Amalgamators to ‘Rulers of the Five Points,’” 193.



[27] Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery*, 148.

[28] Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points,'" 198.

[29] *Ibid.*, 200

[30] Saidya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1997), 99.

[31] Wilder, 213.

[32] Timothy Gilfoyle. "City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920." (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1987), 586-587.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] See Figure 5

[35] Cohen, 117.

[36] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 587.

[37] See Figure 6

[38] Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points,'" 192-193.

[39] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 588.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Cohen, 111.

[42] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 589.

[43] Thomas Gilfoyle. *City of Eros*. (New York: WW Norton & Company Inc, 1992), 325.

[44] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 197.

[45] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 325.

[46] Ibid., 328

[47] Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points,'" 197

[48] Hartman, 80.

[49] Wilder, 219.

[50] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 589.

[51] See Figure 7

[52] See Figure 8

[53] Dorothy Roberts. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 10-12.

[54] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 590.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 319.

[57] See Figure 9

[58] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 591.

[59] Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points,'" 200.

[60] Cohen, 340

[61] Ibid., 365.

[62] Ibid., 116.

[63] Ibid., 302-303.

[64] Alan Kraut, "Illness and Medical Care Among the Irish in Antebellum New York," in *The New York Irish*, ed. R. H. Bayor & T Meagher. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 155.

[65] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 318.

[66] See Figure 10

[67] See Figure 11

[68] "John R Livingston Ancestry Family Tree." *Ancestry.com*. Accessed 6 May 2016.

<http://person.ancestrylibrary.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/tree/51589097/person/13224132841/facts>

[69] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 318.

[70] Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," 593.

[71] Ibid.

[72] "John R Livingston Ancestry Family Tree."

[73] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 318.

[74] Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points,'" 191.

[75] Wilder, 220.

[76] Hartman, 80

[77] John Burnet. *Minutes of Coroner Proceedings, City and County of New York: 1723 or 1724-1762*, ed. F. J. Sypher (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2003), V-VIII.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Burnet, V-VIII.

[82] Peter Baldwin. *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 91

[83] Burnet, 8.

[84] Ibid., 56.

[85] Burnet, 56.

[86] Ibid., 72.

[87] Ibid., 79.

[88] Ibid., 11.

[89] See Figure 12

[90] Lori Lee. "Infanticide". In *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Junius P. Rodriguez. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007.

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[91] Burnet, 57-58.

[92] Ibid., 60.

[93] Ibid., 89.

[94] See Figure 13

[95] Burnet, 25.

[96] See Figure 14

[97] Burnet, 52; Ibid., 85; Ibid., 89.

[98] See Figure 16

[99] See Figure 17

[100] See Figure 18

[101] Burnet, 92-93.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Columbia University. *Catalogue of the Governors, Trustees, and Officers, and of the Alumni and other graduates, of Columbia College (formerly King's College), in the City of New York, from 1754 to 1870*. (New York: Van Nostrand, 1871), 140.

[104] Ibid., 26.

[105] Ibid., 154.

[106] McCaughey, 12

[107] Columbia University, 28; Ibid., 114.

[108] Columbia University, 154; Ibid., 20; Ibid., 21; Ibid., 45.

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