

“Bright Spots Giving Sign in A Dark Sky” - The Columbia University Cross Burning of 1924

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Columbia University & Slavery Course

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Thomas Germain discusses "Bright Spots Giving Sign in a Dark Sky:" The Columbia University Cross Burning of 1924: [video]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MF5HYv_YxGs

Just after midnight on the cold morning of April 3, 1924, several cars drove onto the campus of Columbia University and parked on 116th St, a then functioning road that is now a pedestrian thoroughfare. Between twelve and twenty-five men dressed in civilian clothes stepped out of the cars and scattered across the campus's South Field. A few hundred feet away, a man named Frederick W. Wells had retired to his dorm room in Furnald Hall. Wells was a twenty-four-year-old black law student from Tennessee, and his presence in the dormitory was notable: he was the first black student to live in Columbia's on-campus housing during the academic year.[1]

Wells's room was number 528, on the west side of the building facing Broadway, so he was probably unaware of the activity that was unfolding. Outside, the men had returned

to the field, having traded their street clothes for the white robes and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan. According to newspaper accounts, they marched in formation to the center of field carrying a seven-foot-tall wooden cross, wrapped in cloth and doused with kerosene. There, just north of the college's baseball diamond, and a stone's throw from the University's regal statue of Thomas Jefferson, they planted the cross in the ground, and lit it on fire. As it burned the flames could be seen from apartment buildings blocks away, and inside Furnald, concerned students banged on Wells's door – while others ran through the halls shouting, "Down with the Negro," and "Put the nigger out." [2] In the days following, Wells received two anonymous death threats signed by the Klan. [3]

The cross burning struck a nerve. The story was national news, but for all the attention the cross burning received at that time, it was almost completely forgotten as the years passed. Articles were printed in newspapers in almost every state in the union, and Wells received dozens of letters of support. But excluding those contemporary documents, one could fit everything that has ever been published about the incident on a single printed page. Even within the university the event is obscure, and it is essentially non-existent in the Columbia archives. It is likely that this essay is the first extended piece of writing ever devoted to the subject.

One of the primary goals of this paper is to bring the story out of the darkness. In examining the reactions to the cross burning, and to the situation that led up to it, a picture emerges of a campus, and a country, struggling to come to terms with what it would mean as black people began to move into what many presumed had always been exclusively white spaces.

Many scholars have studied the history of the university. One is historian Robert McCaughey. His semi-official history of the school *Stand, Columbia* is a painstakingly researched book that does not shy away from controversial subjects. For example, McCaughey goes into detail about Columbia's systematic exclusion of Jews in the early twentieth century, although his argument that Columbia was "less hostile to Jewish students than were the other major eastern universities" sets an embarrassingly low bar. [4] However, *Stand, Columbia* barely makes any reference to the existence of black people on Columbia's campus before the 1960s. One could call this a failure on the part

of the author, but in fairness, the omission is also a consequence of the fact that this information is surprisingly obscure.[5]

The students and researchers involved with the Columbia University and Slavery project have done impressive work. Along with sources like Craig Wilder's *Ebony and Ivy*, their efforts have begun to paint a picture of the relationship of the university to African Americans and slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But between abolition and the 1960s, when the historical record is richer, our understanding of black experience at and of Columbia remains fragmentary. As scholars develop our conception of this period, the 1924 cross burning serves as more than another example of the legacy of slavery, or of what one might mistakenly assume to be a Southern-style racist event taking place in the North. It challenges the modern conception of Columbia as a bastion of progressivism, and it provides a window into the contentious world of a diversifying campus and nation.

Of all the individuals involved in the cross burning, two stand out. The first is Wells himself. Frederick Wilson Wells was born in Union City, Tennessee in 1899.[6] His academic record reflects a man who was intent on achieving an education at a time when access was limited for black students. He attended public schools in Union City and went on to enroll at Wilberforce University, a historically black institution. After two years there he transferred to Ohio State University, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1919. Wells then studied at Yale in 1921, where he had a YMCA scholarship. He matriculated at Columbia Law School in 1924.[7] It is a fair assessment to place Wells within the so-called "New Negro" movement of the early twentieth century, a term coined by figures in the Harlem Renaissance to describe a movement among black Americans that prioritized the celebration of black culture and uncompromising rejection of white supremacy.[8] Wells's pursuit of higher education at historically white institutions, his response in the aftermath of the cross burning, and his later career of activism embodies the self-respect, assertiveness, and independence that was the hallmark of the New Negro.

The second key figure is John Bunyan Rucker. If Wells's presence living and studying law at Columbia was noteworthy, Rucker was a person one might have expected to find

in that position in the early twentieth century. He was a white Southerner, born in Rutherfordton, North Carolina in 1891.[9] Rucker was a star student at Wake Forest college, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree and made a name for himself as a public speaker and prominent member of the debate team.[10] There is no record of Rucker expressing racist or discriminatory views while at Wake Forest, although he was undoubtedly exposed to them. During his tenure, the college celebrated itself as the alma mater of Thomas Dixon, writer of the book that inspired the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, which is often credited as the driving force behind the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.[11] Furthermore, the pages of *The Old Gold and Black*, the Wake Forest newspaper, include references to student interest in the K.K.K. in articles printed around the time Rucker was a student.[12] One issue that reported on Rucker's debate-team victories featured an advertisement for a tailor with the suggestive slogan, "We Specialize in Klassy Klothes for Young Men," a thinly veiled reference to Klan regalia.[13]

After he graduated, Rucker worked as an oratory instructor at several high schools in Virginia. He then received a scholarship to attend Columbia Law School and moved to New York to begin his studies in 1921.[14] Rucker had been living in Furnald for some time when Wells arrived, and he was the chairman of the student-run Hall Committee, which oversaw the dormitory.[15] It was in this role that Rucker played a part in the cross burning.

Wells moved into Furnald Hall on March 5th, 1924. He apparently went unnoticed for the first few weeks because many of his peers assumed he was an employee of the university.[16] Wells's initial ability to fly under the radar raises several points. First, it speaks to the extent to which black people were present at the university, and shows that, as they do today, people of color made up a sizable portion of the university's staff. And while Wells was the only black person living on campus at the time, the administration asserted that there were at least six other black students enrolled in Columbia College, and as many in the graduate programs.[17] The historical record conceals the presence of black people, including students, on Columbia's campus during this period. The other black people on campus certainly faced their own struggles

in this period, but no significant disturbances regarding their presence are preserved in the historical record prior to the cross burning.

Second, the mistaken assumption that Wells was an employee suggests that many of the other white students living in Furnald were at least indifferent about Wells's presence in the dorm. Students who lived on the fifth floor with him would probably have been aware that Wells was a resident from day one. In fact, after the cross burning, students who openly supported Wells would outnumber those who publicly opposed him. Finally, the assumption demonstrates the nuances of the negative feelings held by the students who would soon speak out against sharing a dorm with a black person. According to a newspaper article, black employees working in Furnald had complained about negative treatment from the residents prior to the cross burning.[18] Thus, while some Columbia students had expressed antipathy toward black people on campus, most white students tolerated black employees inhabiting the space of the university, and evidently, they accepted black students studying among them. But the idea of a black man living alongside whites in the dormitory crossed a boundary.

At some point toward the end of March, Wells had some guests come to see him, and it was then that his peers realized that he was a resident of Furnald.[19] Almost immediately, a group of students mounted an effort to have Wells evicted. It is difficult to pin down exactly how many students were involved in this movement, but some aspects of the group are clear: nearly every participant mentioned by name was a Southerner, and John B. Rucker, who was probably their leader, was the most outspoken among them.[20] According to Rucker and another member of the Hall Committee named L.H. Hill, a number of Southern white students approached the committee and asked that something be done about Wells.[21] This may have been accurate, but it is just as likely that Rucker and White intentionally stirred up discontent.

In late March, Rucker called a meeting of the Student Hall Committee to discuss what should be done about Wells.[22] Other members of the committee who were not Southerners, such as students Lawrence Goldberg and Charles Mantell, opposed taking any discriminatory action, and later resigned in protest.[23] Their objections were either overruled or ignored. The next day Rucker went to speak with Herbert Hawkes,

Dean of Columbia College and head of the University Committee on Residence Halls, on April 1st, 1924. Claiming to speak on behalf of the Student Hall Committee, Rucker demanded that Wells be ejected from his room, threatening that he and other students would move out of Furnald if the university did not take action.[24] Hawkes, (who would later maintain that the movement against Wells was solely Rucker's doing) refused the demand. According to Hawkes, Rucker retorted, "Well, I will give you some publicity and see how you like that." [25]

The next day, April 2nd, several New York daily newspapers ran articles about the controversy brewing at Columbia.[26] Dean Hawkes later asserted that it was Rucker who contacted reporters about the story.[27] The prominent place Rucker plays in these newspaper articles bolsters this claim and lends credence to the notion that he spearheaded the movement to oust Wells, which Rucker subsequently denied.[28] Unlike some pieces that followed later, these articles maintained a semblance of objectivity, although Wells's voice was entirely absent from the reporting. The gist of these stories is that a group of Southern malcontents represented by Rucker were calling on Dean Hawkes to evict Wells, and that the administration was poised to reject the request.[29]

But the real publicity came the following day, when the cross was burned in the early hours of April 3rd. The exact details of the incident are hazy. Information is dispersed across a wide range of sources with conflicting information, but the rough outline of events is clear. One of the most useful pieces is a detailed article from *The New York World* printed on April 3rd, which provides a sketch of the event in line with most other accounts, though it differs in some details.[30] The accuracy of the information in this article and other news sources should not be taken for granted, but *The World* and other New York papers are more reliable because of their proximity to Columbia. This is especially true for articles published in the immediate aftermath of the event when more distant periodicals were less likely to have access to witnesses. According to *The World*:

The cross was brought to the university by a group of about twenty-five men in civilian clothes who rode in several automobiles. They drove to the hall on 116th Street,

between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, and leaving their machines at the curb ran into South Field and scattered in every direction. They reappeared in a few minutes, this time wearing the costumes of the Ku Klux Klan, and forming into four groups they marched six abreast to the center of the snow-covered field... As soon as they were sure their work was complete, the figures in white robes, who may have been real Klansmen or college students or others playing a practical joke, fled, discarded their robes, and returned to the automobiles.[31]

Sources that printed extended coverage of the event contradict some of the specifics of this account. Some discrepancies are more significant than others, but the number of men who could be drummed up to burn a cross on short notice speaks to the prevalence of racist sentiments, if not Klan membership. *The New York Evening Post* for example, suggested that there were only twelve men present at the demonstration.[32] *The Columbia Spectator* struck a middle ground, and reported that “Judging from stories which obtained credence on the Campus yesterday, it seems that four automobiles brought about twenty men to the Amsterdam Avenue gate of South Field.”[33] It is also worth mentioning that *The World* would be the only paper to report that the men marched in a predetermined, rigid formation. This speaks to another question raised by *The World*: were the men actual Klan members, unruly college students, or “pranksters?”

That the men arrived in cars in the first place makes it unlikely that they were students, both due to financial constraints and because they would be less likely to need transportation. Furthermore, witnesses made no suggestion that they saw students at the cross burning. In statements Dean Hawkes gave in the following days, he said he was certain that students were not responsible, though he had the incentive of protecting the university’s image when he drew this conclusion.[34] Other reports make it seem unlikely that the men came from outside Columbia, and point toward the likelihood that whoever they were, they were Klansmen. According to *The New York American*, the cross itself was one piece of evidence. *The American* reported that students had “declared that [the cross] was beyond question the professional handiwork of Ku Kluxers and not a college prank.”[35] The implication was that someone involved

had a cross lying around that was put together with burning in mind. *The Akron Beacon Journal* reported that there were indications the men came from New Jersey, specifically Mont Claire.[36] These papers failed to identify the source of this rumor, so it can only be taken so far, but it is worth noting that New Jersey was a hotbed of Klan activity at the time.[37]

Other details complicate the story. The chain of events reported in *The World* and elsewhere is puzzling. The notion that the men arrived in civilian clothes, scattered across the field, and returned in Klan robes raises the possibility that someone on campus had colluded with them to plant the robes nearby for their arrival. Furthermore, it is impossible to believe that real Klansmen would discard their robes as they fled. At the time, official Klan robes cost as much as \$5, and they had symbolic value as well.[38] This detail was unique to *The World*. The fact was not repeated elsewhere, and there were no mentions of robes lying around the campus in any reports.

Complicating the question of the perpetrators' identities further, the death threats sent to Wells both point to student involvement and trouble the notion that the cross burners were actual K.K.K. members. The first was a handwritten note signed "KLANSMEN," which was slipped under Wells's door the night after the cross was burned.[39] However, it was reported that three men were standing guard at Furnald Hall that night, so it is doubtful that someone unaffiliated with Columbia could have gained access to the building. The person who delivered this note was likely a Furnald Hall resident, though that does not rule out the writer's Klan membership.

The second, typed letter came by mail the next day, and had Ku Klux Klan headquarters letterhead pasted in place of a signature, and thus was more credibly written by actual Klansmen. This letter is threatening, and warns Wells that he is out of line, and offers him the "good gentlemanly advice" that his well-being depends upon respecting the white men who find his presence distasteful. But bizarrely, the letter suggests that "It is doubtful that [the Fiery Cross] was set up by members of this organization as we would not wish to antagonize our white Catholic friends in this controversy, but it is well to heed its message to you just the same." [40] It is hard to say why the Ku Klux Klan would not want to antagonize Catholics, though it could have been because they

represented a more powerful group in the city. Regardless, even to a died-in-the-wool Klansmen reading about the incident in the newspaper, things did not add up. Taking all of the details into account, it is difficult to say who exactly the men who drove onto the South Field were, but they had a connection to the student body. Whether or not actual Klansmen were involved, those who burned the cross espoused Klan ideology.

Frederick Wells's voice was missing from the initial flurry of articles published the day before the cross burning, either because reporters were not interested in quoting him, or because they could not reach him before they went to press.[41] But Wells's voice rang on out in the newspapers after the morning of April 3rd. If his decision to move into Furnald in the first place was bold, it pales in comparison to his stance in the face of the cross burning. It seems that Wells first became aware of the demonstration on the South Field when concerned students, including Lawrence Goldberg, banged on his door. According to newspaper reports, Wells admitted his neighbors once they identified themselves, and it was probably then, amidst the racist jeers of other neighbors, that Wells truly understood the scope of the problem.[42]

Journalists swarmed Wells the next day to get his take on the story. In every statement he gave about the cross burning, he maintained a consistent, audacious position. Many of the quotes from Wells seem to have been taken from the same interview, probably given when he met with a group of reporters in his dorm room, whom he apparently greeted in a bathrobe and a nightcap.[43] *The New York Times* quoted Wells as saying:

I came here to get an education and went through the customary procedure in obtaining my room... I was at the bottom of the waiting list and waited until a room was assigned to me in Furnald Hall. I shall remain in it as long as I have the money to pay for it. That is final. I will not be bullied in any way. If anyone attempts violence he may be sorry for it. But if I can be shown why I am undesirable, I shall be glad to go elsewhere. I shall always obey the university officials, and if they ask me to leave the university or the dormitory I shall do so.[44]

Here and in other statements, Wells made it a priority to establish himself as an unimpeachable figure. By focusing on his respect for rules, procedure, and a deference

to rightful authority, he makes it clear to any level-headed observer that his opponents' feelings come from nothing but baseless prejudice.

At the same time, he walked a fine line between respectability and defiance towards his antagonists. As he put it in *The New York World*, "It will take more manly men than those who now oppose me to oust me."^[45] Wells emphasized his fearlessness. "I saw the flaming cross in the field," Wells told *The New York American*, "They can burn all the crosses they want to, but if they attempt to enter my room I'll show my teeth. What they attempted was the most ridiculous thing they could do."^[46] In context, his rhetoric was clearly strategic, especially considering how neatly his stance fit into contemporary articulations of black politics. The entire episode began when Southern students realized that Wells had stepped across an unwritten boundary, and the cross burning was an attempt to use fear as a weapon to restore the power structures of white supremacy. By ridiculing Klan activity, showing that he was unintimidated, and suggesting he was ready to defend himself, Wells signaled to his antagonists that their efforts had failed.

Looking back at Wells's statements, it would be easy to compare his words to the vocabulary of black activists in the 1960s, or even to the philosophies of contemporary figures like Marcus Garvey, and conclude that Wells was less than radical. But such assumptions overlook the environment in which he was operating. The 1920s was the high point of Ku Klux Klan activity. In New York City alone, Klan membership was reportedly as high as 15,000, and that is to say nothing of the surrounding area.^[47] In the midst of an empire of men couched in secrecy and predisposed to violence, Wells's bravery is remarkable. True, Wells did not call for a new world order, or even ask for justice from authorities. In his statements he simply argued for the right to be left alone, and to sink or swim on his own merits, a posture reminiscent of that of W.E.B. Du Bois, with whom Wells would certainly have been familiar. As he put it in *The New York American*, "I am here pursuing my law studies to their conclusion. I mind my own business and wish my neighbors well."^[48] Yet Wells was pushing at the boundaries of societal structures designed to hold him down. He stood up in defiance against men who sought to humiliate him and threatened his life, and he faced them unflinchingly.

Immediately, Wells started receiving letters, telegrams, and phone calls of support from around the country. Wells saved a few dozen of these messages, which are now housed in New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.[49] Many of the letters, particularly from black writers, express sentiments like those that Wells voiced in his own statements on the issue. Among the letters he saved, the majority came from white writers, although it is hard to say whether this represents the ratio in the original documents or the decisions he made when saving them.

One interesting source of messages were black activist organizations. As soon as the first set of articles were published on April 2nd, James Weldon Johnson, executive secretary of the NAACP, got involved. Johnson began investigating the issue and contacted Dean Hawkes to ask if the NAACP could offer him any help.[50] Once the cross was burned and Wells had made statements to the press, Johnson did not waste any time, and telegraphed Wells on April 3rd to commend him on his "manly stand," and pledged the support of the NAACP. But his interest was tied up in something greater than Wells's personal well-being. Johnson did not mince words: "We feel that you appreciate that in this case you are not merely an individual but that you are representing the hopes and aims of the best and bravest in the negro race today." [51]

George Edmund Haynes, a black Columbia alumnus and founder of the Urban League, wrote to Wells and expressed a similar sentiment, saying:

As an alumnus of the University and one of the former Negro students to enjoy its privileges, I commend the position you have maintained in what is by no means a personal matter. You are acting not only for your personal interest but also for the academic opportunity of a great company of aspiring Negro youth. There is also involved a principle of freedom vital to every American of whatever creed or color whether in academic halls or out of them.[52]

To many observers, the challenge Wells faced was more than an individual struggle, it was a test of the values and protections of the American system. He understood his position, whether or not he needed to be reminded of it. Wells voiced the gravity of the role that had been thrust upon him in a quote he gave to *The New York World*, saying, "I

hope my children, if ever I have any, will inherit the pride for my race that I feel more than ever now.”[53]

Other black writers who contacted Wells resonated with his more bellicose statements, such as his suggestion that he was ready to “show his teeth.” One writer wrote in with the amusing comment that “The southern white babies have had the ‘pacifier’ too long, and their hearts and brains are becoming atrophied. They need something nourishing and developing. You have the chance. Give it to them.”[54] Others were more direct. Thomas W. Anderson, then the Minister of Labor and Industry of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, wrote to Wells saying:

Your stand is courageous, and is typical of the spirit of the New Negro. He no longer runs when a white face shows itself as displeased with his presence. Why should we run? The white man is but flesh. If you prick him he bleeds. If you hit him hard enough he falls. He dies as do other races. He is but man after all, and subject to the same inherent laws. He must be respected for his achievements, but feared, -- NEVER.[55]

This call for the defiant rejection of white supremacy is representative of the most radical reactions to the cross burning. A black activist named Ernest Chalwill telegraphed with a similar sentiment, saying, “It takes more than the bogus KKK to intimidate the New Negro.”[56] Another anonymous letter echoed the call for self-defense, stating “If you would get a permit to carry a pistol and shoot to kill anybody to tried to annoy you, I’m sure it will discourage the skunks who fortunately are in the minority in N.Y.C.”[57]

Wells also received messages from more obscure black organizations, including a mysterious group calling themselves “The Visible Republic of the Negro Klu Kluxers,” which took things a step further.[58] The N.K.K. forwarded Wells a copy of a letter they wrote Rucker, in which they adopted the language and tactics of the Klan:

Dear Rucker:

In the matter of Mr. Fred’k Wells you have played to prominent a part. We are calling you to halt... Just a little ‘good gentlemanly advice,’ that’s all. You may inform the Ku

Klux Klan at their meeting that you have been instructed to go slow with their plans in honor of Mr. wells because 'it is an essential necessity that you be included in those festivities.' You may be assured that it is your turn next if any harm comes to the one representative of our race in that dormitory... Rucker, what we want is by no means what you term social equality, which is in itself a side issue, but what we want and what we are now going to get is 'absolute equality in every respect.' We feel ourselves entitled to it, and as we for centuries have been asking, begging and pleading for it without avail because of the hypocrisy of white men of your type, we are now in the process of organizing our resources to take it. Unlike the K.K.K. our organization is solely to serve the purposes of defense... The only kind of language your type understands is force, and as you have been alone in its use for too long, we too, have decided to try it...

Yours in action,

The Committee Extraordinary of the Negro Klu Kluxers [sic].

The N.K.K. included a note to Wells at the bottom of the page telling him, "A member will see you in the near future... Don't let them scare you." [59]

This visceral message is interesting for a number of reasons. For one, it quotes directly from the letter sent to Wells on Klan letterhead – which had been reprinted in newspapers – in several places, including the offer of "good gentlemanly advice." The N.K.K. was adopting not only the language but the tactics of secrecy and threat that were the hallmark of the Ku Klux Klan. The call for black self-defense was not new, having been present even in the writings of men like Frederick Douglass, but today the philosophy is more commonly associated with later figures like Malcom X and the Black Panthers. Perhaps more than any other document, the letter from the N.K.K. demonstrates the changing tide of popular black political activity. This sentiment could not be more unlike the respectability politics promoted by figures like Booker T. Washington, and it went beyond the philosophies of contemporary actors like the NAACP. The ideas expressed by the N.K.K. represent a sea change. What is perhaps most fascinating about the militant letters in the context of the body of documents Wells

received is that black actors across the political spectrum seemed to feel that Wells embodied their ideals.

Letters from white writers expressed a variety of sentiments, many offering the refrain that Wells should “stand by his guns,” and complimenting him on his bravery. Most condemned the Klan, but interestingly, these feelings often seemed to stem from anxiety over how Klan activity reflected on white people, rather than out of concern for the organization’s victims. While all of these letters were written to express support, many seem to miss the mark. A fellow Columbia student wrote asking, “Please don’t misjudge us white fellows because of this unfortunate occurrence.”[60] Another author, writing anonymously, offered Wells a disquieting compliment, “Your skin is dark, brother, but you are white – white to the core.”[61] It would be inappropriate to paint all of the varied and often heartfelt messages penned by white authors with the same brush. Yet they express lukewarm sentiments more frequently than those by black writers, as evidenced by the prevalence of anonymous notes. For many, the cross burning was disagreeable, but not to the point that they were willing to protest it openly.

In the context of the early twentieth century, the behavior of Columbia’s administration towards Frederick W. Wells might be construed as forward-thinking. However, this was not necessarily the case. For example, the decision to admit Wells into the residence halls in the first place should not be mistaken for progressivism in light of contextual details. On the day of the cross burning, *The Columbia Spectator* wrote, “those in charge of the dormitories have pointed out that not only are Hindu, Japanese, and Chinese lodged in the University residences without comment but that in the past negroes have lived there too.” Dean Hawkes was quoted as saying, “There have always been negroes at Columbia, as well as students of other nationalities.” Hawkes also made it a point to highlight the fact that applicants to dorm rooms were not asked to declare their race or nationality.[62]

The claim that there had “always been negroes at Columbia” is worth dissecting. Wells was not the first black student at the university, and black employees, if not slaves, had been present at Columbia since its founding. In fact, black students had resided in the dormitories Livingston Hall and Hartley Hall the previous summer.[63] There is no

record of controversy regarding prior black residents, perhaps because white students attending the summer session may have had different expectations than those attending during the regular academic year. Still, Wells was cited as the first black student to live on campus during the fall or spring terms, and he was the only black resident in the spring of 1924.[64] The administration may have seen their decisions to approve his application for residence in Furnald as uncontroversial – an extension of the status quo rather than a step forward. Wells would be living among other non-white residents, and his predecessors had not raised controversy. It is also possible that administrators were unaware of his race when his application was accepted. A “race blind” policy is not more likely to be inclusionary or sensitive to the needs of non-white students.

Similarly, the administration’s response to the Wells controversy might seem enlightened on its face, but was less so beneath the surface. For all intents and purposes, Dean Herbert Hawkes was the only official who spoke for the university on the issues surrounding the cross burning, so his position may be taken as Columbia’s official stance.[65] Some of Hawkes’s statements have a tinge of progressivism, but taken as a whole his behavior could best be described as centrist. He seemed focused on preserving the status quo. On April 2nd, when reporters went to Dean Hawkes to ask for an administration response to the demands of Rucker and the Hall Committee, he stated:

The residence halls of the university are for the benefit of all the students. If a man finds his surroundings uncongenial there is no need for him to stay. There are waiting lists of hundreds, and any vacancies can be filled at once. It has not been the usage to exclude men from the residential halls on the ground of their parentage.[66]

However, this seemingly bold rebuke did not match the scale of the problem once the cross was burned, and in the aftermath some of Hawkes’s statements would be questionable.

After the cross burning had taken place, Hawkes took steps to reaffirm the university’s stance, saying that “no discrimination is countenanced against anyone [at

Columbia].”[67] Substantiating this position, the university accepted a five-dollar deposit from Wells for a room the following summer.[68] Going a step farther, *The Akron Beacon Journal* reported that “University authorities say that if any more Ku Klux demonstrations are attempted, members will be dealt with ‘decisively and perhaps roughly.’”[69] It also seems that Columbia hired private detectives to patrol Furnald Hall, and Hawkes telegraphed Wells’s father, saying, “Your son perfectly safe no danger attending personally to precautions [sic].”[70]

However, confusion surrounding the detectives betrays the possibility of mixed motives on behalf of the university. These men claimed to be members of the NYPD bomb squad, and some newspapers reported this to be the case.[71] Yet other sources wrote that the detectives had admitted to Furnald Hall employees that they were actually taking orders from a Columbia official named Clifford B. Wright. It was also reported that Wright was providing accommodations for them in Furnald, and that they had instructed to call him “if anything broke.” However, Wright himself explicitly denied he had hired the men.[72]

Wright’s denial may be explained by the university’s desire to downplay the event, which can be seen in a number of other statements given by Dean Hawkes. Speaking to *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Hawkes said, “I talked with several students supposed to have witnessed the ‘supposed’ burning of the fiery cross on the campus... If it was burned, it was done, I feel sure, by non-students.”[73] The same quote was repeated in an article in *The Atlanta Constitution*. [74] This spurious analysis was mirrored by *The Eagle*’s reporting, which questioned the existence of the flaming cross in the body of the article. Whether students were responsible is one issue, but questioning whether the cross was burned at all was simply dishonest. Not only did Hawkes speak to eye-witnesses, but in that very article, *The Eagle* admitted that a charred spot on the field was proof that a demonstration had taken place. In fact, the cross was still on campus. *The New York World* wrote that students had carried the burnt remnants into Furnald hall on the night of the cross burning, and that it was still sitting in the room of French professor Frederick Hofher on April 4th, the same day Hawkes suggested to *The Eagle*

that there might not have been a cross burning at all.[75] If he had any doubts, Hawkes could have left his office and taken a short walk to see the physical evidence.

Other comments made by Hawkes suggest that dismissing the controversy was first in his mind. In *The Atlanta Constitution*, Hawkes reported that he would not be making any efforts to identify the men who brought the cross to campus, presumably because he had decided they were not students.[76] In *The Detroit Free Press*, Hawkes dismissed the entire affair as “probably a grudge match,” as if to imply that the incident was a personal dispute, and racism was an unimportant factor.[77] And Hawkes was also intent on emphasizing the notion that the entire affair was Rucker’s doing. When James Weldon Johnson offered to help Hawkes with the trouble on campus on April 2nd, Hawkes’s response was “Trouble? There is no trouble.” He then explained that the whole matter was simply the work of one “trouble-making, disagreeable fellow,” whom he subsequently identified as Rucker.[78] Later, in a letter he wrote to a Mrs. Alfred Myer, which she forwarded to the NAACP, Hawkes wrote, “There really is no controversy that amounts to anything except in the newspapers.” He went on to reiterate the point about Rucker, and concluded with, “I hope that the whole matter will blow over in the course of a day or two and that the University will not be injured by the incident.”[79]

In all of his statements, concern about injury to the university consistently seems to take precedent over concern over injury to Wells. Hawkes never made any public statements about precautions that were being taken to protect the young law student. He also never made any suggestions that policies were being reviewed to prevent similar incidents from cropping up in the future. Rather, he comes across as exasperated, a man working to give the impression that the affair was trivial and unworthy of his time and attention. One might argue that this was a tactic he was using to undermine the activity of racists, and make it seem as though their work was ineffective. However, this interpretation is hard to accept given that Hawkes maintained the same attitude in his private communications, and actually voiced it more explicitly when not speaking in public.

From the beginning, Dean Hawkes’s statements give the impression that his primary concern was public relations, not protecting Wells or fostering a hospitable environment.

He expressed no interest in identifying and penalizing those who took part in racist actions. Furthermore, there is no record of Rucker or any other individuals facing disciplinary hearings, despite Hawkes repeatedly identifying Rucker as the instigator of on-campus Klan activity. Rucker graduated from Columbia law school in good standing later that year.[80] One might speculate that Hawkes's behavior was founded on an informed belief that Wells was not actually in any danger, but no evidence backs up this supposition.

The actions of Dean Hawkes have broader implications. In his efforts to minimize the hate crime committed against Frederick W. Wells, Herbert Hawkes made haphazard and often disingenuous statements that may have bolstered the all too popular belief that issues of racism, violence, and discrimination were non-existent, or not serious if they did exist. The cross burning could have served as a wake-up call to the campus and the city about the dangers of the Klan at a moment when support for the organization was at a high. By spreading misinformation and sweeping the issue under the rug, the university lessened what good might have come from the event. Instead of denouncing the event, Hawkes trivialized it.

Just as noteworthy as the statements from Hawkes was the silence coming from another office at the university. Columbia's President Nicholas Murray Butler never gave a public statement about the cross burning. This is curious, as Butler was outspoken against the Klan before the incident, and he continued to be so for years afterward. For example, in February of 1924, Butler spearheaded a movement to unseat Texas Senator Earle Bradford Mayfield because of his affiliation with the Klan.[81] And in June, Butler spoke at black church in Harlem, saying, "hooded Klansmen are cowards, and god help a coward." [82] Butler's work against the organization was more than a passing interest; in Columbia's collection of his papers, an entire folder is dedicated to his collection of K.K.K. propaganda, and correspondence with prominent opponents of the Klan. Butler was so outspoken that Klansmen sent him hate mail, referring to him as a "lackey of Rome." [83] For members of the Klan, his activity confirmed their beliefs about a looming papal conspiracy to undermine American values.

But despite his fervor, Butler never commented publicly on the Klan activity on his own campus. His silence reveals the nature of his feelings against the organization. Though he condemned discrimination in his anti-Klan writings, most of his criticisms focused on the fact that Klan activity was un-American, and that it represented a disruption of the democratic process. He rarely, if ever, made statements about the Klan's victims. Ironically, in a sense his distaste for Klansmen mirrors the Klan's own antipathy towards minorities: both for Butler and for the Klan, the targets of their ire were despicable because they represented a degradation of American values. His silence on the cross burning at Columbia bolsters this interpretation. If the prime motivation for his efforts to combat the Klan was the negative way the organization reflected on Americans, and thus on Butler himself, it makes sense that his response to the events of April 1924 would be to bury them.

Taking a longer view of the university than the response, and lack thereof, to the cross burning, other contextual facts suggest a less than admirable attitude towards racism at Columbia. In Craig Wilder's book *Ebony and Ivy*, which describes the historical relationship between America's universities and slavery, he argues that "the academy never stood apart from American slavery – in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage." [84] This was as true at Columbia as it was at any other historic institution. For example, in the early days of the university, Columbia was markedly active in field of race-based science. Wilder uses the actions of Columbia's professors in the early nineteenth century as an illustration of how academia rose to the prominent station it currently enjoys by providing "scientific" defenses for slavery and racism at a moment when religious justifications were losing their luster. [85]

As the 1800s wore on, Columbia became the center of revisionist history through the propagation of a racist historiography known as the "Dunning School," born out of the work of Columbia Professor John W. Burgess and then pushed to the forefront of popular thought by one of his students, William A. Dunning, another Columbia professor. [86] The impact of the Dunning School cannot be overstated. Professor Eric Foner, who has written extensively on the subject, once described it in an interview, saying:

The traditional or Dunning School of Reconstruction was not just an interpretation of history. It was part of the edifice of the Jim Crow System. It was an explanation for and justification of taking the right to vote away from black people on the grounds that they completely abused it during Reconstruction. It was a justification for the white South resisting outside efforts in changing race relations because of the worry of having another Reconstruction. All of the alleged horrors of Reconstruction helped to freeze the minds of the white South in resistance to any change whatsoever.[87]

At Columbia this “academic” sort of racism was not only tolerated but promoted. Yet in 1924 the crude, mob mentality of the Ku Klux Klan, and the vulgarity of a cross burning, was a bridge too far for the administration. Black people on campus like Frederick W. Wells were immediately damaged by events like the cross burning, which the university weakly condemned, but the negative effects of Columbia’s racist academic pursuits were longer lasting and more significant. And while the cross burning was forgotten, Columbia celebrated Professor John W. Burgess as recently as 2004, when the school described him as one of a group of “Columbians Ahead of their Time” as part of the university’s two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary celebration.[88]

It is also worth mentioning prejudiced student activities that were countenanced by the administration. Among many examples, one is particularly illustrative. In the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, the enforcement of rules governing freshmen was left to a student-run group known as the “Black Avengers.” The organization enforced regulations through public shaming, paddling, and more extreme methods, (such as one incident where a student was spirited away to New Jersey for a beating).[89] In a manner that seems strange when viewed from the present, this student-led corporal punishment was carried out with the cooperation of the university administration. One article explains that the Black Avengers would report repeated offenders who refused to change their behavior to Dean Hawkes, and Hawkes would carry out further discipline from that point on.[90]

The actions of the Black Avengers are sinister in light of a few details. In the 1910 yearbook, an advertisement for the group featured a decomposing skeleton hanging from a lynch rope, and a diminutive character bowing before hooded, demonic

figures.[91] Worse still, an article from a campus publication describing the group refers to the group as “the Sophomore KKK,” and features a photograph of members of the Black Avengers standing on the South Lawn wearing what could only be described as black Klan robes, apparently the organization's uniform.[92] The student body saw an obvious connection between the policing of naughty freshman and the enforcement of “American values” carried out by the self-appointed vigilantes of the Ku Klux Klan. Among both students and administrators, this racist symbolism did not seem to raise any red flags, but that changed after the events of April 3rd, 1924.

In the months after the cross burning, Columbia began to scrutinize this student group more carefully. One can only assume the two phenomena were connected. However, the Black Avenger were slow to change, When the administration declared a moratorium on the organization’s more violent activities in 1924, the Black Avengers introduced a new punishment, a “Humility Box,” in which rule-breakers would be imprisoned and made to wear signs and dog collars on the campus’s South Lawn.[93]

As an institution, Columbia played an influential part in preserving the power structures of white-supremacy, but the administration saw a dividing line between this activity and the open racism of the movement to oust Frederick W. Wells. Similarly, while the student body both tolerated and participated in extracurricular activities that are appalling by today’s standards, many students seemed to feel that the cross burning was unacceptable. Students mounted efforts to combat discrimination almost immediately. [94] As the cross was burning, and the men in Klan robes left, a group of students rushed to the field and extinguished the cross. Members of the Student Hall Committee resigned in protest, and a petition was circulated in support of Wells which stated that the Hall Committee’s action “was contrary to the general sentiment, spirit, and tradition of Columbia University.” The petition had as many as 150 signatures by April 4th.[95]

The students who sought to oust Wells seemed to be in the minority, and once things had gotten out of hand, Rucker took steps to distance himself from the incident. “I am not a Klansman,” Rucker declared in *The New York Times* on April 5th:

I know nothing whatever about the Klan and I know nothing whatever about the burning of the cross in the athletic field early Thursday morning. I have been accused of being instrumental in trying to get Wells out of the dormitory. That is also untrue. About 15 percent of the students in the dormitory are Southerners. The presence of Wells was objectionable to them... There was no course open to me but to call the meeting. We feel that it would be more pleasant to Wells and to the white students if he found rooms outside the dormitory and we say so.[96]

Coming to his aid, the members of the Hall Committee who were in favor of ousting Wells also claimed that Rucker had played a smaller part in the incident than was suggested by the media. Donald Cable, Deane White, L.H. Hill Jr., Arthur Dreshfield, J. D. Severin and Harry Olsen all signed a declaration that stated it was “absolutely false and without foundation in fact the charge that Mr. J. B. Rucker, chairman of the Hall Committee, has instigated and led a fight to oust Mr. Wells.”[97] Of course, reports from Dean Hawkes and others, as well as contextual evidence, suggest that these claims were untrue. John Bunyan Rucker would keep a relatively low profile until he graduated at the end of 1924. He would live out the rest of his life in White Plains, just outside of New York City, where he resided until his death in 1947.

Despite the efforts of students and administrators who opposed discrimination, Columbia was an inhospitable environment for black students in the early twentieth century. Frederick W. Wells did not finish his studies at Columbia, and he seems to have left the university after spending only a year there.[98] Wells would go on to earn an L.L.B. degree from Cornell in 1927, and he spent the rest of his life working in law and real estate. Wells also spent a great deal of his time fighting for the rights of black people in the areas of labor and housing across the country.[99] It is hard to ignore the echoes of his time at Columbia in these efforts. Wells died in New York City in 1979.[100]

There is a popular misconception that slavery was a Southern phenomenon. Wedded to this idea is the notion that the worst aspects of slavery’s legacy, such as racist violence

and the Ku Klux Klan, are concentrated below the Mason-Dixon line, and where they exist in the North they do so to a lesser and less condemnable degree. Of course, the truth is more complicated. The temptation to obscure, reframe, or even erase the more difficult topics of history is understandable. As historian Craig Wilder put it, “Popular fixations with history often reflect popular anxieties about the future. If history is a search for distant truths, then it is also an attempt to regulate the judgements of coming generations.”[101] Until recently, the modus operandi of many institutions – and the country at large – was to bury ties to slavery, prejudice, and violence, presumably with the goal of avoiding the judgement that comes with this association. But as the twentieth century came and went, these lies and half-truths became more difficult to maintain. Today, Columbia’s dedication to the project of uncovering its connection to racism and slavery reflects a new anxiety – that in the future we might look back and condemn the university not for its ties to slavery, but for holding its head high, claiming innocence, and making no efforts at accountability or progress.

America went through dramatic changes in the early twentieth century. Racial violence, legal discrimination, and economic unrest spurred the Great Migration, in which millions of African Americans moved from the South to the urban centers of the North.[102] As many as 1.3 million black Southerners migrated between 1920 and 1930 alone.[103] As the socio-economic system that had dominated the United States was transformed, many white Americans responded out of fear, and the Ku Klux Klan soared to the organization’s highest level of membership and influence. Columbia was a microcosm of the country at large, and national problems played out on a smaller scale. The 1924 cross burning was an example of this phenomenon. Viewed from the present, it is easy to criticize the university for not going far enough in its response to the racist and discriminatory activity taking place on its campus, and this criticism is valid.

However, Columbia does deserve some credit: the university did not bend to the demands of racists, and it took a stand at a moment when it would not have been inconceivable to stay silent.

This face did not go unnoticed, and at the time many contemporary figures celebrated the university’s stance. In *The Chicago Defender*, a writer named Roscoe Simmons

looked to the words of Dean Hawkes in response to the cross burning and saw a forecast of better things to come, describing the behavior of the America's universities as "Bright spots, giving sign in a dark sky." [104] But Columbia is not a hero in this story. If not for people of color like Frederick W. Wells, who stood up in the face of adversity and physical violence, we would not have come as far as we have today. It was these men and women who were the bright spots that Simmons beheld. Black Americans saw their first hint at liberty with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, but the road they began to walk in 1865 would be long and winding, and the work that must be done to establish real parity and justice is far from finished. In this sense, Frederick Wells was a pioneer, a man striving for a level of equality that others fought desperately to keep from him.

Endnotes

[1] "Flaming Cross Set On Columbia Campus," *New York Evening Post*, April 3, 1924. *ThePost* reported that "So far as it can be learned [Wells] is the only negro who has occupied a Columbia dormitory during the regular season." If Wells had predecessors, the administration never pointed to them, and many sources treated Wells's pioneering status as a matter of fact.

[2] "Colored Law Student at Columbia University Is Object of Ku Klux Ire," *New York Age*, April 12, 1924. "Fiery Cross Sends Three Detectives To Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 4, 1924.

[3] "Fiery Cross Set To Frighten Negro, Columbia Student," *New York World*, April 3, 1924. "Cross-Burning Stirs Columbia Student Body," *Baltimore Sun*, April 4, 1924. "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.

[4] Robert McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 257.

[5] Eric Foner, "Columbia and Slavery: A Preliminary Report," Columbia University, accessed May 12, 2017, <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Spreadsheets/PreliminaryReport.pdf>.

[6] Differing sources list his birthdate as either 1896 or 1899. He is consistently referred to as 24 years-old at the time of the cross burning, so 1899 is more likely.

[7] Elmer Anderson Carter, *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 1-2 (New York: Kraus Reprint Co, 1969): 159. "Flaming Cross Set On Columbia Campus," *New York Evening Post*, April, 3 1924.

[8] Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black". *Representations* 24 (1988): 131.

[9] "W.N.C. Deaths – John Bunyan Rucker" *Asheville Citizen Times*, February 10, 1947.

[10] Columbia University. *Columbia University Alumni Register, 1754-1931*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 753. "Admitted to N.Y. Bar," *Forest City Courier*, December 18, 1924.

[11] "Among the Alumni," *Old Gold and Black*, January 10, 1925, Accessed May 12, 2017, https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/2786/ogb_1925-01-10.pdf. Melvyn Stokes, *DW Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007): 234.

[12] "Real Klansmen Take Notice Soph Notice," *Old Gold and Black*, January 10, 1925, Accessed May 12, 2017, https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/1575/ogb_1923-01-23.pdf.

[13] "Wake Forest College Debating Team," *Old Gold and Black*, April 29, 1916, Accessed May 12, 2017, https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/2583/ogb_1916-04-29.pdf.

[14] "Admitted to N.Y. Bar," *Forest City Courier*, December 18, 1924.

[15] "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924.

[16] "Fiery Cross Brings Columbia Negro Aid," *New York Times*, April 4, 1924.

[17] "Columbia For Equal Rights," *Boston Daily Globe*. April 3, 1924.

[18] "Call on Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924.

[19] "Fiery Cross Brings Columbia Negro Aid," *New York Times*, April 4, 1924.

[20] "Furnald Committee Defends Chairman," *Columbia Spectator*, April 7, 1924. Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19240407-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[21] "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Furnald Committee Defends Chairman," *Columbia Spectator*, April 7, 1924.

Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19240407-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[24] "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924.

[25] James Weldon Johnson, "Memorandum In re: Interview of Assistant Secretary with Dean Hawkes of Columbia University," April 2, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[26] Numerous, including "Negro At Columbia Defies His Critics," *New York Times*, April 3, 1924. "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924. "Students Oppose Negro In Dormitory," *New York American*, April 2, 1924.

[27] James Weldon Johnson, "Memorandum In re: Interview of Assistant Secretary with Dean Hawkes of Columbia University," April 2, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[28] "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.

[29] Numerous, including "Negro At Columbia Defies His Critics," *New York Times*, April 3, 1924. "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924. "Students Oppose Negro In Dormitory," *New York American*, April 2, 1924.

[30] "Fiery Cross Set To Frighten Negro, Columbia Student," *New York World*, April 3, 1924. "Cross-Burning Stirs Columbia Student Body," *Baltimore Sun*, April 4, 1924. "Negro Law Student At Columbia Defies Klansmen," *New York American*, April 4, 1924.

[31] "Fiery Cross Set To Frighten Negro, Columbia Student," *New York World*, April 3, 1924

- [32] "Flaming Cross Set On Columbia Campus," *New York Evening Post*, April 3, 1924.
- [33] "Columbia Residents Did Not Burn Cross, Authorities Believe," *Columbia Spectator*, April 4, 1924.
- [34] "Flaming Cross Quiz Agitates Columbia: Protest For Negro," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1924.
- [35] "Negro Law Student At Columbia Defies Klansmen," *New York American*, April 4, 1924.
- [36] "Colored Student Refuses To Permit Klan To Scare Him," *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 4, 1924. "Wells Sees Cross Burn; Defies Klan," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 12, 1924.
- [37] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 178.
- [38] Ibid, 36.
- [39] "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.
- [40] "Colored Law Student at Columbia University Is Object of Ku Klux Ire," *New York Age*, April 12, 1924.
- [41] Numerous, including "Negro At Columbia Defies His Critics," *New York Times*, April 3, 1924. "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924. "Students Oppose Negro In Dormitory," *New York American*, April 2, 1924.
- [42] "Fiery Cross Set To Frighten Negro, Columbia Student," *New York World*, April 3, 1924. "Cross-Burning Stirs Columbia Student Body," *Baltimore Sun*, April 4, 1924. "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.
- [43] "Colored Student Refuses To Permit Klan To Scare Him," *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 4, 1924.
- [44] "Negro At Columbia Defies His Critics," *New York Times*, April 3, 1924.

[45] "Fiery Cross Sends Three Detectives To Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 4, 1924.

[46] "Negro Law Student At Columbia Defies Klansmen," *New York American*, April 4, 1924.

[47] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 280.

[48] "Negro Law Student At Columbia Defies Klansmen," *New York American*, April 4, 1924.

[49] *Frederick W. Wells Papers*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[50] James Weldon Johnson, "Memorandum In re: Interview of Assistant Secretary with Dean Hawkes of Columbia University," April 2, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[51] James Weldon Johnson to Frederick W. Wells, April 3, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[52] George Edmund Haynes to Frederick W. Wells, April 3, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[53] "Fiery Cross Sends Three Detectives To Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 4, 1924.

[54] Mrs. W. N. Cummings and Willis to Frederick W. Wells, April 3, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[55] Thomas W. Anderson to Frederik W. Wells, April 3, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[56] Ernest Chalwill to Frederik W. Wells, April 6, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[57] James Walker (Anonymous) to Frederik W. Wells, April 6, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[58] No other information about the Negro Klu Kluxers was readily available at the time of this writing.

[59] The Visible Republic of the Negro Klu Kluxers to Frederik W. Wells, April 12, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[60] Paul W. Wood to Frederik W. Wells, April 3, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[61] Anonymous to Frederick Wells, April 5, 1924, in *Frederick W. Wells Papers*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. (Emphasis taken from original document).

[62] "Fiery Cross At Night Points To Protest Against Negro," *Columbia Spectator*, April 3, 1924, Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19240403-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[63] "Flaming Cross Set On Columbia Campus," *New York Evening Post*, April 3, 1924.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Other anonymous "University sources" were sometimes cited, and other administrators mentioned by name never gave significant statements.

[66] "Call On Columbia To Dislodge Negro At Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 2, 1924.

[67] "Fiery Cross At Night Points To Protest Against Negro," *Columbia Spectator*, April 3, 1924, Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19240403-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[68] "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.

[69] "Colored Student Refuses To Permit Klan To Scare Him," *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 4, 1924.

[70] Herbert Hawkes To Charles W. Wells, April 4, 1924, in Frederick W. Wells Papers Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[71] "Death Threats Sent To Columbia Negro," *New York Times*, April 5, 1924.

[72] "Fiery Cross Burns On Columbia Campus," *Asbury Park Press*, April 4, 1924.

"Negro Student At Columbia Is Guarded Against Klan," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 4, 1924

[73] "Flaming Cross Quiz Agitates Columbia: Protest For Negro," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1924.

[74] "Dean Investigates Burning of Cross On College Campus," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1924.

[75] "Fiery Cross Set To Frighten Negro, Columbia Student," *New York World*, April 3, 1924. "Fiery Cross Sends Three Detectives To Furnald Hall," *New York World*, April 4, 1924.

[76] "Dean Investigates Burning of Cross On College Campus," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1924.

[77] "Dean Upholds Negro In Row At Columbia," *Detroit Free Press*, April 7, 1924.

[78] James Weldon Johnson, "Memorandum In re: Interview of Assistant Secretary with Dean Hawkes of Columbia University," April 2, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[79] Herbert Hawkes to Mrs. Alfred Meyer, April 7, 1924, in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series A: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1913-1940*, ProQuest History Vault.

[80] Columbia University. *Columbia University Alumni Register, 1754-1931*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 753.

[81] "Butler Will Direct Fight on Klan and Unseating Mayfield," n/a, Box 233, Folder "Ku Klux Klan," Nicholas Murray Butler Papers Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

[82] "Head of Columbia Univ. Attacks Klan," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 7, 1924.

[83] Anonymous to Nicholas Murray Butler, Box 233, Folder "Ku Klux Klan," Nicholas Murray Butler Papers Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

[84] Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 11.

[85] Ibid, 221.

[86] James S. Humphreys: "William Archibald Dunning: Flawed Colossus of American Letters," in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, edited by John David Smith, J. Vincent Lowery, and Eric Foner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 89-91.

[87] Mike Konczal, "How Radical Change Occurs: An Interview With Historian Eric Foner," *Nation*, February 3, 2015, Accessed May 12, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-radical-change-occurs-interview-historian-eric-foner/>.

[88] "John William Burgess," *Columbia 250*, Columbia University. Accessed May 12, 2017, http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_celebrates/remarkable_columbians/john_burgess.html.

[89] "Black Avengers Reappear on Scene; Frosh Scofflaws to Meet Dire Fate" *Columbia Spectator*, October 14, 1926, Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19261014-01.2.3>.

[90] "Change In Rules Curtails Power of Black Avengers," *Columbia Spectator*, October 13, 1924, Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19241013-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[91] "Advertisement for the "Black Avengers," from the 1910 Columbia College Yearbook," Columbia University & Slavery 2017, accessed May 12, 2017, <https://cuslavery2017.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2>.

[92] "Freshman Too Proud to Obey Regulations," n/a News, Box 233, Folder "Black Avengers," Historical Subject Files, 1870s-2016- Series XVIII: Social Issues, Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

[93] "Black Avengers Use Humility Box," To Impress Good Behavior on Frosh" *Columbia Spectator*, December 10, 1924, Accessed May 12, 2017, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19241210-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

[94] Fiery Cross At Night Points To Protest Against Negro," *Columbia Spectator*, April 3, 1924, Accessed May 12, 2017. <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/columbia?a=d&d=cs19240403-01&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->.

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