

William Archibald Dunning: Father of Historiographic Racism Columbia's Legacy of Academic Jim Crow

By Tommy Song

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Tommy Song discusses William Archibald Dunning: Father of Historiographic Racism
Columbia's Legacy of Academic Jim Crow: [video]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJMuhQlsw64>

In March 1878, on a cold Wednesday around midnight, twenty-year-old William Dunning stood on the platform of Norwich-Hanover Station, surrounded by a group of classmates carrying marching band instruments and torches stolen from the old gymnasium of Dartmouth College.[1] Despite the frosty weather, the boys had been outside since nine o'clock. In fact, the band had marched over a mile from Carter Street, two freshmen leading the pack with a fife and a drum across the darkened streets of Hanover, New Hampshire.[2]

Dartmouth's administration had announced on Monday that Dunning, along with six other freshmen, had to be "finally separated from College" for their participation in a mob attack of two brothers, a senior and sophomore.[3] It all occurred a week prior, on

March 12 at exactly two a.m.[4] Dunning and the other freshmen delinquents joined in on an organized assault, in which about thirty students—equipped with broken glass bottles, a heavy club, a large stone, and a single lantern—assembled to break into the brothers' dormitory.[5] All of those mobilized, most with blackened faces, were enraged by previous conflicts with the brothers over an unidentified "old hat," and as a form of ultimate retaliation, the party broke in silently and assailed the siblings, sound asleep in their beds.[6]

Despite the violence, the offenders, as well as the majority of the freshmen class of 1881, deemed the school's response as an unjust abuse of innocent students, the mob's offense as an act of justice over bullies.[7] Members of the Class of 1881 collectively accused Dartmouth's President, Samuel Bartlett, of what they regarded as a despotic resolution to a complex disciplinary case and filed a petition to remove him from the presidency immediately after the administration's announcement. The petition, however, was rejected, and it became clear that the College's decision could not be reversed.[8] Some continued to protest through the student newspaper, while others remained silent, especially since Bartlett censured the Class of 1881 following its petition.[9] The seven freshmen and other offenders, hopeless and dejected, gathered to write their names inside a small leather journal to remember "the outrage," declaring themselves as the "victims of 'Faculty Justice.'"[10] Dunning signed his name on one of the first pages, writing in simple words: "William A. Dunning, a victim." Others also penned their names, describing themselves as the victims of "March 12, 1878." [11] Friends, classmates, and acquaintances left encouraging messages, like Dunning's classmate "Gabe" L. Weller, who wrote, "Wishing all success to you, and death to the Faculty of Dartmouth College." [12] Another classmate, G. W. Patterson from the town of Hanover, penned: "The best of us, at times, are the slaves of bad masters." [13]

Wednesday night of March 20, 1878, was emotional for Dunning, for his time at Dartmouth was suddenly coming to an end. When the clock at the Norwich-Hanover Station hit twelve, the shrill whistle was heard in the distance and the train came sweeping round the curve. In an effort to alleviate the dismal mood and the impending farewell, all the boys at the platform broke out in a song and brandished the burning

torches they had stolen.[14] They shrieked, sang, stomped, and shouted as the train slowly came to a halt and when the doors finally opened, the boys exchanged hearty handshakes and good wishes with their beloved classmate.[15] Within a few minutes, Dunning's friends were trudging back to campus in silence, while the dejected "victim" of "bad masters" was on his way home to Plainfield, New Jersey.[16]

The same freshman, however, returned to Dartmouth on June 24, 1916, not as an alum ashamed of his brief time at the New Hampshire Ivy, but as a proud graduate of Columbia University, ready to receive a Doctor of Letters degree from the original alma mater that had condemned him 38 years before.[17] It was a hot June afternoon, and John K. Lord—professor of classical studies and former instructor of Dunning at Dartmouth—announced before all who had gathered for the 1916 Commencement of the College:

Mr. President: With the pride of a teacher in a former pupil, gaining some credit by reflected light, I have the honor to present...a scholar whose studies, both wide and deep, whose clear thinking, sound judgement, lucid exposition and graceful style have made him an acknowledged authority in history and political philosophy, William Archibald Dunning.[18]

And Ernest Fox Nichols, then President of Dartmouth who served as a professor of physics at Columbia from 1903 to 1909, declared in response:

William Archibald Dunning, entrant at Dartmouth, graduate of Columbia; genial, sympathetic and forceful teacher; close and critical student; clear and able writer; a recognized authority on political theories and the period of reconstruction: I admit you to the degree of Doctor of Letters.[19]

It was a historic moment in Dunning's life. The self-proclaimed "victim" of "bad masters" had evolved into an Olympian authority in American academia, all thanks to the New York City Ivy that had saved the despairing twenty-year-old.[20] The freshman erased from Dartmouth's student directory had transformed into a popular historian, whose unrivaled scholarship in Reconstruction history and political theories justified the post-Emancipation oppression of black Americans. In just four decades, Dunning had placed

himself on Dartmouth's commencement stage and the ceremony was a testimony to the Columbia professor's influence, proof of what he had exactly become: the architect of the Dunning School and academic Jim Crow, a popular brand of scholarship that buried the memory and humanity of "the servile race" in America.[21]

In the midst of the antebellum period—on May 12, 1857—"Willie" Archibald Dunning was born in the quaint town of Plainfield, New Jersey. He was the son of John H. Dunning, a manufacturer and amateur painter with a fondness for literature, and Catherine D. Trelease, whose family often highlighted the necessity of quality education for Dunning and his younger sister Matilda.[22] Since his birth, Dunning was raised by a group of adults who encouraged learning and intellectual capacity and with such a family, the major occurrences of the time—those of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era—naturally became the young historian's topics of interest and thought. As Dunning notes in the commemoration page of his 1907 essay—*Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*—it was through numerous discussions, particularly with his father, that Dunning "was first inspired with interest in the problems of reconstruction." [23]

Other individuals contributed to Dunning's early curiosity in the Civil War's ramifications. When Dunning was five, for example, one of his beloved uncles—Elijah Trelease—died of typhoid while serving in a New Jersey regiment of the Union Army in 1862. Another uncle, who had served in another regiment of the Garden State, lived to retell and remind Dunning of the war's horrors.[24] In 1865, when Dunning was eight, Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant and John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln. In 1868, when Dunning was eleven and two years had passed since the founding of the Ku Klux Klan, news of the Klan and its activities frequently appeared in the pages of *New-York Tribune*—a newspaper with the largest circulation size in the New York City area, and perhaps the nation, during the time.[25] In the same year, news of Democratic President Andrew Johnson's impeachment—which Dunning, an anti-Republican, later denounced in his works—was a national topic of discussion, since it was a first in U.S. history. Along with the usual activities of a New England boy's childhood and adolescence—like baseball, which Dunning enjoyed—the daily news of

national politics and debates over federal policy toward the South became normal constituents of Dunning's mind and life. Thus, early memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction politics, coupled with a paternally-inspired interest in the "problems of reconstruction," planted the seeds that later would bloom as the late Columbia professor's racist rewriting of Reconstruction history.[26]

With the presence of an intellectual family and a turbulent nation fueling his intellect, Dunning excelled in school, particularly in areas involving writing.[27] "I think Willie does remarkably well at writing for one of his age," William Trelease, the uncle who survived the war, wrote to Dunning's mother in 1863.[28] This talent for writing led Dunning to spend childhood days scribbling inside his leather journals. One of his favorite activities involving such journals was coming up with a new written language, one that he often meticulously attempted to explain to his unknown, unidentified readers through numerous rules he had created for the gibberish.[29] Novelty in words, language, ideas, and philosophies—as Dunning's juvenile pastimes and his fondness for writing suggest—was a source of excitement for the future professor and historian; and this early passion in creating something new, a youthful desire to accomplish something significant through the act of writing, remained a central element of Dunning's life.

Young Dunning's intellectual drive reached its peak in 1877, when the future leader of American historiography graduated from his New Jersey high school as valedictorian in the spring of that year.[30] Dunning's apparent academic success was amplified that fall, when he entered the freshmen class of Dartmouth College—a coveted school for the sons of New England who desired an elite, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant education.[31] Dunning probably saw Dartmouth as a perfect institution for the further maturation of his intellectual mind. Dartmouth, after all, was a member of the Ivy League that exclusively produced men who fit Dunning's profile—a white, Northern, Christian boy with an above-average intelligence.[32] Dartmouth was a haven for the sons of wealthy New Englanders who willfully neglected what Dunning referred to as the nation's "inferior class," which encapsulated any American minority, ranging from "the servile race...designated generally as 'persons of color'" to Jewish immigrants of the

decade; from those “who had in them a specified proportion...of negro blood” to Catholics, women, and more.[33]

Much to Dunning’s disappointment, however, his time at Dartmouth ended before the completion of his first year and the College’s decision to remove the young man proved to be the first real failure for the twenty-year-old.[34] Furthermore, because of an unexpected and untimely death of his mother within weeks of his expulsion, that spring of 1878 proved to be a most trying time for Dunning.[35] The combined effect of his mother’s passing and the Dartmouth trauma even led him to seriously consider quitting his pursuit of an elite collegiate education.[36] “I don’t want to go to Princeton and I don’t believe I’ll go anywhere,” Dunning wrote to his former high school teacher, who recommended his former pupil to restart his short-lived college career in his home state Ivy.[37] And when all hopes seemed lost, Dunning received an acceptance letter from Columbia College, another Ivy League institution that, unlike his first, would keep him for years—time that offered Dunning the tools to sustain his passion in creating something new.[38] Columbia, to Dunning, was a second chance for the dejected scholar to act upon his youthful desire of accomplishing something significant; that achievement later manifesting in the form of blatantly racist, neo-confederate records of the nation’s history. Columbia, to the former Dartmouth boy, was his saving grace.

Dunning’s time in Columbia College, much like his past educational experiences, was defined by his vast intellectual curiosity. During the first few months at the College, Dunning took courses in history, English literature, antiquities, chemistry, Latin, and mathematics.[39] Upon finishing his first year as a sophomore, Dunning earned a second-year scholarship in history, and honorable mentions in mathematics and Latin.[40] After meeting the political science professor John W. Burgess, who founded the late Columbia School of Political Science (CSPS) in 1880, Dunning branched out to courses in political science, physics, logic, philosophy, while continuing his studies in classical languages.[41] By December, 1879—winter of his junior year—Dunning’s success exceeded the boundaries of academics and entered the social sphere, as evidenced by his classmates’ fondness for the Junior Class President.[42] At Commencement of 1880, the end of his junior year, Dunning earned a scholarship in

Greek and another in logic and English literature.[43] In 1881, the graduation year of his freshmen class at Dartmouth, Dunning completed his undergraduate studies, earning a B.A. with numerous scholarships in just three years. He even read a Latin poem before his class at commencement as the salutatorian of the Class of 1881.[44] During his undergraduate days, Dunning fueled his passion for learning, strengthened his intellectual capacity with Columbia's emphasis on the liberal arts and classical texts, and confirmed his unique sociability. Instructors praised Dunning's intelligence, while peers commended Dunning's character and charisma.[45]

Immediately after earning his bachelor's degree, Dunning stayed on campus to enroll in the master's program of the new CSPA, predecessor to the University's current Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Under the guidance of Burgess, founder of the School and mentor of Dunning, the passionate graduate student took classes in various topics relating to political science, including American government, constitutional law, constitutional history, and Roman law.[46] From 1883 to 1884, for example, Dunning enrolled in one of Burgess' lectures in the Law School titled "Constitutional History of Europe," a course that provided Dunning with the foundation for his dissertation, which he completed in 1885.[47] In the lecture centered around the era of European constitutionalism, Dunning acquired the knowledge and mechanics necessary in the enhancement of his academic foundation in political science, political theory, and history.[48] Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau were among the many discussed in the course; from the French philosopher Auguste Comte to Louis XVI and Benjamin Franklin to Roman Emperor Augustus, Burgess studied numerous individuals integral in the history of constitution and government.[49] Furthermore, Dunning, as he indicated in his lecture notes, learned to differentiate the spheres of political science and political theory, as well as the crucial doctrine—emphasized by Burgess—that the study of political science is inseparably based in history.[50] From his predecessor, Dunning learned the importance of objectivity and the impossibility of truth.

Two principles, imparted by Burgess during the course, seemed to frequently occupy Dunning's thoughts and words. First, Dunning reiterated throughout his notes, "we must recollect that we are men in Society; we are surrounded by conditions, relations,

customs, institutions, and laws.”[51] Second, Dunning emphasized in the “Introduction” of his notebook that “Absolute truth is found nowhere, but the approach to it is the closer according as an author’s ideals come nearer to true ideal forms.”[52] These two ideas, acquired from Burgess during the final year of Dunning’s path toward a master’s degree, remained with the historian throughout his life as a scholar of reconstruction and political theories. He later claimed—frequently yet incorrectly—that his white supremacist historiography was grounded on the ideals of impartiality and historical accuracy.[53]

In 1884, after three years at CSPA, Dunning received his M.A. and began his final task of graduate school: writing his dissertation. With the historical and political knowledge he had accrued during six years at Columbia, Dunning decided on the topic of Reconstruction and the Civil War. Additionally, with his newfound proficiency and fluency in constitutional histories and theories, Dunning fused his persistent interest in the Reconstruction era with the history of U.S. constitution, completing “The Constitution of the United States in Civil War and Reconstruction 1869-1867” by the end of the year.[54] Published in the *Political Science Quarterly* (PSQ) in 1886, Dunning’s dissertation was a promising first gesture. To other historians of Reconstruction history, “The Constitution” pointed to Dunning’s potential in incorporating ostensible impartiality with research and theorization that no other scholars of the time seemed to have mastered.[55] Moreover, the dissertation also indicated Dunning’s nascent, pseudo-scientific racism, which he had ingrained in his mind over the years through his professor Burgess.[56] Dunning argued in “The Constitution” that the enfranchisement of freedmen hindered the process of the nation’s recuperation, emphasizing that the sudden freedom of former slaves prevented southern whites—the victims—from fairly appraising the Radical Republican plans of reorganizing the ex-Confederate states.[57] The Ph.D candidate asserted that Radicals would have had a better chance of accomplishing their objectives had they completely removed the “negro question” from the equation. He argued that from the moment President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law, the South began “her struggle...a desperate battle for existence.”[58]

After the publication of his dissertation, Dunning began to build his academic reputation. With the essay appearing in the *PSQ* the same year Burgess founded the publication, Dunning officially entered the stage of Reconstruction historiography.[59] Slowly yet steadily, he inched his way up the food chain; from undergraduate to Doctor of Philosophy, to eventually a full-time professor and more. This upward process—facilitated by Dunning’s geniality, intellect, and Protestant status—hinted at the looming stardom of the young Columbia graduate, as well as the kind of scholarship he would produce—ostensibly logical and academic historical analyses that embraced the Southern apologist perspective.[60]

After receiving his Ph.D from the CSPA, Dunning was hired by the University to be an associate professor of political science. The quality of his dissertation, general academic accomplishments, and relationship with Burgess all contributed to the University’s decision that Dunning was competent for the job.[61] With the security of professorship, Dunning chose to briefly exit U.S. academia to participate in a one-year program at the University of Berlin, a decision encouraged by Burgess who also studied in Germany during the 1870s.[62]

Germany, in the late nineteenth century, was the hub of international progressivism, including the radical transformations of European academia that led to the formation and development of “scientific history.”[63] At the University of Berlin, for example, Dunning was engrossed by the prevalence of the scientific method of scholars like historian Heinrich von Treitschke and Leopold von Ranke, who founded the practice of source-based historiography.[64] The concept of “scientific history” had been both familiar and abstract for Dunning throughout his graduate years with Burgess; he could not grasp the discipline with complete confidence.[65] To Dunning’s delight, professors at the University of Berlin elucidated the ideologies and theories Burgess had spoken of in New York, like the inevitability of bias in historiography and the significance of geography in historical objectivity.[66] Although Burgess had introduced to the Morningside alma mater the European principles of research that subsequently placed the University at the forefront of American research institutions, the direct absorption of Germanic approaches in historical writing—like Ranke’s model of rejecting speculation

and embracing objective research—inspired Dunning to further emphasize and promote “scientific history.”[67] This fusion of the scientific method and historiography, paralleled by the similar merging of evolutionary biology and race theories, was frequently used by Burgess and others to “scientifically” propagate and validate white supremacy.[68]

In his lectures, Burgess often noted the forces of the Teutonic “germ theory,” stating that the exclusively white, Anglo-Saxon founding of the American constitutional republic can be attributed to the biological superiority of the founders.[69] Although an *associate* professor with a comparatively milder racist rhetoric, Dunning, whose foundation in historical research was now reinforced by his brief German education, prepared to return home with a renewed sense of excitement, ready to share the knowledge he had gathered with his students.[70] He was eager to launch his professional career and put his education to use, which would provide the tools for the next generation of historians—those of the Dunning School—to further his narratives of Southern victimization and Northern aggression.

After his time in Germany, Dunning officially immersed into his teaching career, which concurred with a series of milestones—personal and professional—that assisted Dunning’s ascent to the top of the academic ladder. In 1884, with the establishment of the American Historical Association (AHA), Dunning became one of the founding members, since he had helped his colleagues in mobilizing and organizing membership and governance.[71] As a member of the Association—excluding his year-abroad in Germany—Dunning actively served to crystallize a central network of U.S. historians. Along with the AHA, Dunning also worked for numerous publications, primarily engaging with the *American Historical Review* (AHR), the AHA’s official journal, and the *PSQ*. Actively writing and editing for both the *AHR* and the *PSQ* throughout his life, Dunning often contributed to other publications as well, ranging from *The Nation* and the *Journal of Education* to *South Atlantic Quarterly* and the *Journal of Southern History*. [72]

Along with his involvement in various organizations of history and political science, Dunning’s early years as associate professor also witnessed a personal achievement. In 1888, the part-time historian and associate professor married Charlotte E. Loomis, whose presence became Dunning’s primary source of comfort; the couple sustained an

emotional bond that both individuals cherished and depended upon.[73] Dunning often referred to Loomis as “sweetheart” and “my darling abandoned wifey,” while Loomis frequently used the phrase “Hub x I.”[74] The couple often traveled together to various sites of historical, political, or artistic importance, from Gettysburg to the Vatican; Paris to Milan.[75] Every summer following 1888, Dunning and his wife visited the small town of Lake Sunapee, New Hampshire, which they nicknamed “Dreamland,” for it was their favorite place on the planet.[76] With such a happy marriage, and an occupation that increasingly excited the professor, Dunning continued his professional career in full force and joy, each sphere of his life providing respite for the other.

The period following marriage involved routines that remained constant throughout Dunning’s life until his death. The Columbia historian continued to accumulate a fan base on campus through his approachability, teenage sense of humor, and historical insights.[77] As University of Chicago professor Charles E. Merriam—who Dunning met two years after his marriage—highlighted in an obituary of his professor, the late scholar’s “personal qualities endeared him to all who came within the bright circle of his acquaintance.”[78] Furthermore, this “bright circle” expanded significantly as years progressed. In 1893, for example, Dunning assumed the role of full-time professor of political science, joining the ranks of Burgess and other influential scholars of Columbia. Through such successes, Dunning’s influence and admirers grew steadily.[79]

The upgraded professorship in political science was, however, not enough for the ardent educator. During the 1890s, in addition to his role as full-time faculty of political science, Dunning was appointed to be an adjunct professor of history for the College, a role that he accepted gladly.[80] Now a professor of both undergraduates and graduate students, Dunning continued to expand his authority by involving himself in numerous projects on and off campus. In 1896, for example, Dunning tirelessly pushed for the establishment of a course in U.S. history for College juniors, and convinced the trustees and University President Seth Low to permit the incorporation of the class.[81]

Along with his undergraduate courses and graduate seminars, Dunning was chosen by the editorial board of the *PSQ* to be the journal’s Managing Editor in 1894, his term lasting three years until 1897.[82] During his time as the head of the publication,

Dunning successfully managed the content and workflow of the notable periodical in political science. With his judgement in discerning quality articles and his editorial skill that stemmed from his talent in writing, Dunning created a lasting standard for the journal.[83] Editorship was a skill that seemed innate for Dunning. Apart from the managerial responsibilities of circulation, distribution, and more, Dunning continuously published original content in *PSQ* and others throughout his tenure.[84] In 1896, for example, he composed two original essays and three reviews for the *PSQ*, a review of a French book on parliamentary politics for a French political journal, and one original article for the *AHR*. [85]

In 1897, after a series of editorial accomplishments, the adjunct professor became a full-time professor of history at Columbia College as he completed his first tenure as Managing Editor of the *PSQ*. [86] In just twelve years, Dunning reached Burgess' class of academic hierarchy from his previous status as pupil and graduate student. [87] Through his active participation in various academic journals, constant involvement in the education of Columbians of all ages, and countless friendships with students and colleagues of history and political science, Dunning formed an academic reputation that demanded recognition.

In 1898, Dunning scored another victory when he published his first volume on the topic of reconstruction titled *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics*. [88] The text, dedicated to his wife, was a step-up in the young professor's career. Now well on the radar of other reputable scholars in his fields of study, Dunning's *Essays* received praise from historians and political scientists alike, their responses generally twofold. [89]

First, many noted that the analyses within Dunning's *Essays*, equipped with lucid presentations of ideas, were buttressed by a bedrock of primary sources; second, the text, Dunning's peer professors claimed, held high educational value with its topical focus on the changing dynamics of the U.S. Constitution. [90] Vanderbilt history professor Frederick W. Moore, for example, noted in his review of the Columbia professor's volume that "It is evident... Professor Dunning has thoroughly familiarized himself with the documentary evidence on the period." [91] Moore further praised

Dunning, writing that “To the teacher and the student,” Dunning’s *Essays* will “afford valuable and timely help in the further study of the period.”[92] Leo S. Rowe, professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania and later President of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, echoed Moore’s sentiments in his review.[93] “It would be difficult to find a more thorough corrective for many of the current misconceptions as to the place of our written constitution in the political life of the country than the series of essays contained in this volume,” the Pennsylvania graduate commended Dunning, declaring that “For this reason, if for no other, every student of political science will give it a warm welcome as an important contribution to American constitutional history.”[94]

However, Dunning’s *Essays*, though informative in its discussions of constitutional changes during the era, was a despicably racist portrayal of the Reconstruction era and an equally detestable approval of the system of Jim Crow. When discussing black Americans, Dunning’s scientific method lost relevance, or rather, lost necessity; the professor, now in his forties, believed racial inequality as natural, unworthy of supporting evidence since it was—and should be accepted as—an innate truism.

Compared to “The Constitution,” *Essays* displayed the uncensored racism of the Columbia historian. The dissertation showcased its bigotry in a relatively subtle light, while the first volume on reconstruction—blatantly and confidently—justified, legitimized, and eulogized systemic oppression post-Emancipation. From his brief discussions of “the negro question” in “The Constitution,” Dunning moved on to elaborate upon the inferiority of black Americans at greater lengths, the word “negro” appearing with a conspicuously increased frequency.[95] The legal workings of the blooming Jim Crow, Dunning explained in *Essays*, were “too intricate for the average negro intelligence.”[96] Moreover, “the abolitionist fever,” Dunning declared, “was the root of the trouble in the South.”[97] The Columbia professor argued that the institution of “slavery had been a *modus vivendi*,” a societal arrangement necessary for the peaceful coexistence between two races of unequal standing.[98] Thus, Dunning pronounced that with the abolition of slavery, the nation inevitably lingered in a state of confusion and could only return to peaceful coexistence with the creation of a new system that “must in essence

express the same fact of racial inequality.”[99] Dunning’s *Essays*, in short, was a clear rejection of color, humanity, and morality.

Perhaps the racism displayed in *Essays* should be understood as a characteristic sentiment of the time, considering *Plessy v. Ferguson* occurred two years prior to the publication of *Essays*; perhaps exclusively labeling Dunning as a racist is an incomplete, unfair analysis of the scholar, since *Essays* encompassed illuminating interpretations of governmental transformations. But the fact remains that the professor’s first book on reconstruction, coupled with his second volume that would come in 1907, was a perilous validation of discrimination, eclipsed by the scholar’s examination of constitutional evolution. The fact remains that *Essays* set an example for Dunning’s students, inspiring them to follow his ostensibly scientific claims. The fact remains that *Essays* was another contribution to the young professor’s growing influence and authority; to the still existing belief that racial equality is a utopian trait—a historical unreality—whose pursuit would only be a delusional, impractical effort.

The 1898 publication of the *Essays* was followed by another breakthrough in Dunning’s career before the century’s end. In 1899, owing to Dunning’s previously successful tenure as Managing Editor from 1894 to 1897, the editorial board of the *PSQ* re-appointed Dunning to be the publication’s leader.[100] This time around, accepting the extended reign of four years, Dunning led the team with his usual insight, judgement, and knowledge, continuing the journal’s legacy until 1903. During his second term as Managing Editor, Dunning continued pursuing his undying childhood zeal of creating something of novelty. In 1902, he published *A History of Political Theories: Ancient and Medieval*—the professor’s first of three volume on political theories—which documented the evolution of political literature from Cicero to Machiavelli.[101] Owing to the absence of the United States and slavery as central subjects, *A History of Political Theories* may seem to lack Dunning’s ordinary bigotry. However, concealed beneath the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle—underneath the seemingly harmless and deceptively academic discussions of classical texts and political theories—Dunning planted the claim that the European people of Aryan descent are “the only truly political peoples—the only ones who have separated politics from ethics, metaphysics, and theology.”[102]

Despite the undertones of white superiority, the study was greeted with an outflow of praise immediately after its publication.[103] Dunning's peers uniformly commended the text, for Dunning had gifted the world with "the indispensable guide for all serious students of formal political philosophy." [104] Others lauded Dunning's dispassionate tone, noting that *A History of Political Theories* embraced a detached, objective perspective; that "few men of equal ability have been able to resist the temptation to... advance a dogmatic philosophy." [105] Writers of the *Columbia Law Review* emphasized Dunning's lucid prose, writing that his "pleasing style... adds so much to the attractiveness of the author's lectures." [106] The significance of *A History of Political Theories* rests with the fact that, regardless of the degree of racism and near-unconditional praise of the work, it was another addition to Dunning's collection of success; with its inconspicuous undercurrents of Social Darwinism, the text granted itself and other works by Dunning a distinct air of academic legitimacy.

Although the waves of acclaim for *A History of Political Theories* could have been the climax of Dunning's unhindered growth in academic authority, Dunning became Columbia's first ever Francis Lieber Professor of History and Political Theory just a year after in 1903, the last year of the professor's second tenure as Managing Editor of *PSQ*. [107] Like a déjà vu of 1897—when Dunning was appointed full-time history professor as his *PSQ* editorship was coming to an end—the reconstruction historian had climbed up to another level, a new peak for Columbia's history professors, as his second term as *PSQ* Managing Editor came to a close. Aged forty-six, Dunning was standing on the top rung of the Columbia ladder; from the reckless ex-Dartmouth boy who considered giving up his college education, Dunning had become the most influential figure of history and political theory at the very hub of American political science.

Dunning's life after 1903 can be summarized as a continual buildup of the historian's career until his death, sprinkled with a few misfortunes. Beginning in 1903, for example, Dunning experienced throbbing pains in his hands, which, toward the last few years of his life, eliminated the option of handwriting for the historian. [108] In 1911, Dunning, at age 54, wrote about his deteriorating hand to his friend and colleague Frederic Bancroft,

whose name is still honored at Columbia with the prestigious Frederic Bancroft Prizes in history and diplomacy.[109] He wrote, “My hand is so crampy I can’t write physically.”[110] In 1914, Dunning, still in his fifties, scribbled in barely legible words in a postscript to his wife, “Writing is frightfully hard.”[111] Despite this, however, Dunning resumed his usual routine of editing, teaching, and writing, devoting his time to the dissemination of what he deemed truthful historical knowledge. And in 1907, four years after the start of aching hands and Lieber professorship, Dunning published *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*, the historian’s second and last volume of the reconstruction that is the culmination of his racism.[112]

In *Reconstruction*, Dunning denounces Radical Reconstruction and paints the white Southerners as the primary recipients of injustice during the era of Reconstruction, which reflects the central sentiments of *Essays* and Dunning’s other works on the era.[113] *Reconstruction*, however, diverges from the professor’s previous collection of essays in numerous ways. First, the later work combines and draws from the works of Dunning’s graduate students, the core residents of the infamous Dunning School.[114] Among these students were renowned Alabama historian Walter L. Fleming, Mississippi historian James W. Garner, and leading archivist of the South J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton.[115] Referencing the works of Fleming the most, Dunning used his students’ studies partly for the sake of a detached, holistic approach, since his students hailed from nearly all seceded states; and partly because Dunning was too lazy and lack of research forced upon him a hasty writing process.[116] Regardless of Dunning’s reasons, however, the numerous works of former students included in *Reconstruction* demonstrated the influence and connections the Columbia professor had amassed since his first days as associate professor of political science in 1886.

Along with student works, *Reconstruction* distinguished itself from *Essays* with the increased instances of heightened racial rhetoric, which Dunning so carelessly compiled for the readers to take as fact.[117] Unlike Dunning’s forbear Burgess, who at the very least exhibited consistency in his works by using Teutonic theories to support his claims of white superiority, Dunning in *Reconstruction* interjected his racist assertions without any hint of applying the scientific method that he cherished.[118] When discussing the

Southern states' implementation of Black Codes immediately after the war, Dunning wrote: "The freedmen were not, and in the nature of the case could not for generations be, on the same social, moral, and intellectual plane with the whites."^[119] This generalizing claim of black inferiority, excluding the blatant racism, was never explained, qualified, or supported by Dunning in the following sentences.^[120] Dunning's racist rhetoric, as evidenced by the quote above, was exacerbated in terms of the severity of bigotry since the *Essays*, but the noticeable amplification in Dunning's racist remarks was never accompanied by his typical "academic" explanations.^[121] Despite these shortcomings of *Reconstruction*, during the time of its publication, the volume produced considerable accolade.^[122] Rowe, who praised *Essays* in 1898, wrote in his review of *Reconstruction* that the Columbia professor "gave to students of American history a new outlook upon a period of our national development which has been so generally neglected, but which is fraught with lessons of the deepest import."^[123] In another review of *Reconstruction* published in the *AHR*, Elisha B. Andrews—economist and professor of political economy at Brown during the 1880s—wrote that the book was "of extraordinary excellence."^[124] "His mastery of the subject and of its literature is ideally thorough," the former Brown professor praised his Columbia counterpart of much greater authority, accentuating his "analysis of causes and situations" for being "keen and correct."^[125] Interestingly, Dunning referenced Andrews in *Reconstruction*, informing the reader that "The years after 1870 are very well treated" by Andrews' *The United States in Our Own Time*.^[126]

Andrews' review and Dunning's reference both point to the fact that, within the sphere of academic dialogue, Dunning had become a seminal figure. James Ford Rhodes, renowned historian of reconstruction who won two Pulitzer Prizes during his lifetime, was another referenced in *Reconstruction*. Rhodes, as one of the few predecessors of Dunning, was the only individual who Dunning commended without hesitation and in 1907, after the publication of *Reconstruction*, Rhodes personally thanked Dunning for mentioning his works. "I must thank you first for your graceful and complimentary references to my own work," Rhodes' letter to Dunning read. "I am fortified too in my conclusions from you having reached independently similar ones...with a knowledge of the legal and constitutional questions, transcendently beyond my possession."^[127] By

the time of the publication of *Reconstruction*, Dunning's recognition was, as evidenced by the language of Dunning's predecessor, an honor for all scholars of history and political science.

After *Reconstruction*, Dunning worked on more projects and writings of his own. The same year *Reconstruction* was published, Dunning began composing a sketch of former Republican senator and 13th Secretary of Interior Carl Schurz, whose statue facing Columbia's College Walk from Morningside Park was erected in 1913. The Dunning-Bancroft duo completed *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* in 1917.[128] Along with the biography of Schurz, the historian continued his work as member of the AHA, AHR, PSQ, as well as the American Political Science Association (APSA).[129] Bearing the pains of his damaged hands and his wife who frequently became ill in the 1910s, Dunning continued teaching, offering his usual courses and lectures in not only Columbia's campus, but also other institutions like Johns Hopkins and Georgetown.[130] In January, 1913, after University President Nicholas Murray Butler encouraged him to do so, Dunning took on the project of writing a review for the centennial event of the end of the War of 1812, titled "One Hundredth Anniversary of Peace Among English Speaking Peoples."[131] Dunning also began partaking in various other University activities and social events, like attending the Lawyers' Club in New York City, or the exclusive Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C.[132] He was no longer a professor or a scholar, but rather the center of attention among educators, scholars, politicians, businessmen, and other celebrities.[133] Owing to his numerous social interactions and friendships with the nation's most famous academics and dignitaries, Dunning was elected President of the AHA, reaching a level of academic and social authority that paralleled, if not surpassed, that of past AHA presidents like Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Adams.[134]

Dunning's presidency of the AHA was an achievement that provided Dunning with thousands more connections, more people to influence and indoctrinate with his ideas. This fact was best demonstrated during and after his first presidential address at the 1913 annual meeting of the AHA in Charleston, South Carolina.[135] Before traveling South to attend the meeting, Fleming, arguably Dunning's most infamous pupil, penned

Dunning, “I am authorized by those former students of yours who expect to be in Charleston for the Historical Association to request that you dine with them.”[136] During his stay at Charleston, Dunning encountered historians and scholars of history from across the nation, who all congratulated Dunning on his election.[137] When Dunning gave the address before the hundreds gathered there, he received a standing ovation and applause; once he returned to New York, letters flooded his office and home.[138] Edmund Raymond Turner of the University of Michigan, for example, called his address “excellent and valuable for all of us...there is little doubt that all of us your audience enjoyed it as much as you desire.”[139]

Just weeks after the presidential address, in January 1914, the chief constituents of the Dunning School—sixteen graduate students Dunning worked with—published a monograph titled *Studies in Southern History and Politics*, what Merriam, who was among the sixteen, described as “a testimonial to his inspiring work in this field.”[140] Butler, on January 8, wrote to Dunning, congratulating him on the publication and his rewarding time as an educator. He wrote: “I look forward with keen interest and pleasure to the appearance, through the University Press, of the volume of *Studies in Southern History* made in your honor. These are things which make teaching worthwhile.”[141] In the preface of *Studies in Southern History*, James W. Garner, Mississippi Dunningite, penned: “For more than twenty-five years he has been a distinguished member of a distinguished faculty and during this period hundreds of toilers for the doctorate have sat at his feet and received inspiration and wisdom from his teaching.”[142] The publication of *Studies in Southern History* was the peak of Dunning’s career as educator and the unofficial origin of the Dunning School’s name.

Rewarding for Dunning but inexorably racist, the Dunningites produced works that elaborated the topics discussed and provided by Dunning’s two monographs on reconstruction. Fleming, for example, focused on the solution to the abolition of slavery and “the race problem,” much like his predecessor’s *Essays* that discussed “the race problem” at length.[143] William R. Smith, Wisconsin historian, wrote on the topic of “negro suffrage in the South,” echoing *Reconstruction*, in which Dunning dedicates much paginal space regarding the “problem of suffrage.”[144] Garner wrote on Southern

politics since the Civil War, like *Essays* that trace the legislative battles of policies in the South post-Civil War.[145] The entire volume was, in its essence, a public indication of the unofficial Dunning School's arrival; a signal that a new generation of historians were ready to extend Dunning's racist legacy.

The rest of Dunning's life after *Studies in Southern History* encompassed a few more personal triumphs. He continued working with students of Columbia, current and former. In 1915, for example, he helped review Garner's "testimonial volume," probably of his 1920 work titled *Civil Government for Indian Students*.^[146] That year, he also helped Dunningite scholar of Georgia C. Mildred Thompson, who was the President of Vassar College's chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and attended the meeting of the society when she invited him.^[147] In 1916, as previously introduced, Dunning received a Doctor of Letters degree from Dartmouth.^[148] In 1920, he published *History of Political Theories, From Rousseau to Spencer*, concluding his voluminous work in political theories.^[149] In 1921, the APSA elected Dunning as president, opening another door of connections for Dunning, such as the Canadian Political Science Association and the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences.^[150] He wrote and edited for the *AHR* and *PSQ* until his death, reviewing and revising numerous articles and essays.^[151]

Even during his last year, the Columbia historian did not cease to devote his energy and attention to the AHA and the APSA. As President of AHA, Dunning met with countless historians and scholars across the country to implement new programs in history or consult individual regarding the education of history. Lord James Bryce, British Ambassador to the United States under Teddy Roosevelt, was among the many who met and befriended Dunning during the time. Bryce received research help from Dunning when the British politician and historian was working on his manuscript volume on modern democratic governments, which was published in 1921 titled *Modern Democracies*.^[152] Once in a letter written to Dunning, Bryce asked Dunning about the Grandfather Clause, inquiring about the purpose and ramifications of the law.^[153] Through interactions like these, Dunning further disseminated his prejudiced views on the reconstruction, and with people like Bryce, his influence exceeded the boundaries of Columbia and the nation.

1917 was the year in which Dunning's life began to lose its vitality rapidly. His beloved wife Catherine passed away and with her sudden absence, Dunning lost his source of respite and love. The vacation spot of the Dunnings, Lake Sunapee, New Hampshire lost its purpose after 1917. Dunning took no more sabbaticals and trips to Paris, England, Gettysburg, or the Vatican.[154] Opening the will that his partner had written four years before, Dunning, whose own health was deteriorating, realized that he, too, was not far from the end of his journey.[155] "My wedding ring must not be removed but buried with me," Mrs. Dunning wrote in 1913, with the words "must not" underlined several times.[156]

Dunning died on August 25, 1922.[157] Leaving his term as president of APSA incomplete, Dunning was unable to deliver a presidential address in December at the Association's annual meeting in Chicago.[158] The address, titled "Liberty and Equality in International Relation," was published the next year in *PSQ* and in it, Dunning denounced and rejected "The dogma that all men are equal." [159] If he had been alive, he would have read before hundreds that the notion of human equality, originating from France and incorporated in the Declaration of Independence, "has played its large part...in the disappearance of serfage and slavery from most of the earth," that it "has been used to undermine and bring to ruin systems and institutions based on the liberty that means dominion." [160] His concluding sentences of the speech would probably have resulted in all the political scientists, politicians, and scholars exploding with cheer and applause. The last lines read: "Peoples, like individuals, are not by nature free; peoples, like individuals, are not by nature equal...Self-determination is for peoples is what anarchy is for individuals." [161]

The most obvious consequence of Dunning's wildly successful career belongs to his students. Much like their beloved professor, the Dunning students, after Columbia, became active writers, editors, and scholars of reconstruction, promoting Dunning's teachings with a heightened rhetoric of racism. For example, Fleming, who was a professor of history at West Virginia University, wrote the introduction and notes for a book titled *Ku Klux Klan: It's Origin, Growth, and Disbandment*, in which he claimed that the Klan deserves to be recognized for its noble acts, not just its violence.[162] He

wrote, “The important work of the Klan was accomplished in regaining for the whites control over the social order and in putting them in a fair way to regain political control.”[163] Claude Bowers, author of the best-selling *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln*, denounced the Republican party for the development of “negro suffrage,” “negro politicians,” “negro delegation,” “negro ticket” and “negro vote.”[164] The popularity of *The Tragic Era* was chiefly responsible for injecting the Dunning School ideologies into the vessels of the public, for the anti-Republican narrative appealed to the people.[165] Bowers’ book, with much of the public attention surrounding it, caught the eyes of David W. Griffith, Kentucky native movie director who created “Birth of A Nation,” in which black men are portrayed as barbaric, sexually insatiable beings and the Klan is painted as heroic knights.[166] The film, which did not have any direct relations to Dunning’s works or any Dunning School scholars, nonetheless still played a role in further popularizing the Dunning School racism. The despicable portrait of black Americans as savages—in both film and writing—provided an intellectual foundation for racism in both the academic and public spheres.

It is crucial to reflect upon the consequences of Dunning’s life and his Dunning School, especially in the context of the current political climate and uncertainties surrounding the nation’s disgraceful past. William Archibald Dunning was an intelligent scholar interested in historical accuracy and academic progress. Although his intent, in its purest form, may have been noble, Dunning failed to recognize the humanity of black Americans. Consider this: in 1910, when W.E.B. Du Bois presented “Black Reconstruction and its Benefits” in front of the American Historical Association, Dunning praised the black scholar’s work, despite the fact that it rejected Dunning’s interpretations of the era completely.[167] Only three years prior, Dunning published *Reconstruction* and legitimized segregation as a necessary system for the peaceful coexistence of black and white Americans; four years after, Dunning wholeheartedly approved his students’ works in *Studies in Southern History*, lauding their contributions that championed white supremacy.[168] Dunning praised Du Bois’ work, but his praise was aimed at the text; the humanity of Du Bois was never admitted, rather, Dunning was probably surprised by the scholastic capabilities of the black man standing before him.[169]

Dunning's life, with all of his accomplishments in history and political science, were ultimately an attempt to accurately report historical facts for the sake of justice that turned out to be an assault on fellow humans of darker pigmentation for the sake of false superiority disguised as peaceful coexistence. In that sense, his professorship, editorship, leadership, and friendships at Columbia—along with what many praised as his acumen, geniality, intellect, and passion—provided the professor with his weapons of assault, much like the broken bottles, clubs, and stones from the night of March 12, 1878 in Dartmouth College.[170] Without Columbia, Dunning or the Dunning School would not have come to existence. Although their works and following have disappeared from modern academia, they still loom over the nation, remaining in the minds of citizens who were shaped by the Dunningite literature and interpretations. White supremacy and racial violence surpass the boundaries of physical terrorism; they occupy and benefit from academia as well as mass media. Members of an academic institution, therefore, bear an obligation to know the history of the space they populate—both good and bad. As members of Columbia, it is thus critical to accept and process the evils of those who came before us.

Endnotes

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- [3] Memorandum of final vote, March 18, 1878, Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records, 1770-2004, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
- [4] Manuscript record of March 12, March 19, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File, Dartmouth College Alumni Records Office, Dartmouth College.
- [5] Letter, March 31, 1954, Dunning '81 Alumni File.
- [6] Manuscript record of March 12, March 19, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File.
- [7] Excerpt from *The Dartmouth*, March 21, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File.
- [8] Manuscript record of March 12, March 19, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File, Dartmouth College Alumni Records Office, Dartmouth College.
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- [11] Journal titled "Autographs," William Archibald Dunning records, 1900-1920.
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- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Excerpt from *The Dartmouth*, March 21, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File.
- [15] Excerpt from *The Dartmouth*, March 21, 1878, Dunning '81 Alumni File..

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[23] Dunning, *Reconstruction*, ix.

[24] "#39 Elijah S. Trelease." (Burial Record of New Jersey Soldiers, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 1736; Letters, William Trelease to Catherine T. Dunning, multiple dates.

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[113] Dunning, *Reconstruction*; Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War*.

[114] Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 342-257.

[115] Ibid; Smith et al, *The Dunning School*, ix-x.

[116] Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 342-257; Muller, "Look Back without Anger," 334.

[117] Dunning, *Reconstruction*; Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War*.

[118] Class notes taken at the School of Law, 1883-1884, Collection of Legal Notebooks; Muller, "Look Back without Anger," 338. On page 332 of Dunning's lecture notes, the last page, Dunning wrote, "With France, finally, then, all Teutonic Europe had become constitutionalized Europe." In "Look Back without Anger," Muller indicates that Burgess firmly believed that the Teutonic "germ theory" irrefutably substantiated white superiority.

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[142] Dunning, *Studies in Southern History*, v.

[143] Dunning, *Studies in Southern History*; Dunning, *Essays*, 379.

[144] Dunning, *Studies in Southern History*; Dunning, *Reconstruction*, 174.

[145] Dunning, *Studies in Southern History*; Dunning, *Essays*.

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[147] Letter, Mildred C. Thompson to William Archibald Dunning, December 2, 1915, box 2, MS#0372, William Archibald Dunning records, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[148] Invitations from Dartmouth, May and June, 1916, William Archibald Dunning records.

[149] Merriam, "William Archibald Dunning," 692.

[150] Ibid.

[151] William Archibald Dunning, "Disloyalty in Two Wars," *American Historical Review*, no. 4, (1919): 625-630; William Archibald Dunning, "European Theories of Constitutional Government After the Congress of Vienna," *Political Science Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1919); William Archibald Dunning, "Henry Adams on Things in General," *Political Science Quarterly* 34, no.2 (1919).

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[153] Letter, James Bryce to William Archibald Dunning, January 8, 1920.

[154] Muller, "Look Back without Anger," 337.

[155] Smith et al, *The Dunning School*, 95.

[156] Will, Charlotte L. Dunning to William Archibald Dunning, April 14, 1913, box 5, MS#0372, William Archibald Dunning records, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[157] Smith et al, *The Dunning School*, 95.

[158] William Archibald Dunning, "Liberty and Equality in International Relations," *Political Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1923).

[159] Ibid.

[160] Dunning, "Liberty and Equality in International Relations."

[161] Ibid.

[162] John C. Lester, *Ku Klux Klan: It's Origin, Growth, and Disbandment*, (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1905).

[163] Lester, *Ku Klux Klan*, 35.

[164] Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln*, (Cambridge, MA: The Literary Guild of America, 1929), 187, 324, 341, 459.

[165] Eric C. Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 28, 2015.

[166] Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters."

[167] Charles H. Wesley, *The Intellectual Tradition of a Black Historian* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 90.

[168] Dunning, *Studies in Southern History*.

[169] Wesley, *The Intellectual Tradition*, 90.

[170] Letter, March 31, 1954, Dunning '81 Alumni File.

Archival Sources

Board of Trustees Records, 1770-2004, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College. This collection includes the records of all Dartmouth College trustees. The records were used to find out how the College decided to remove Dartmouth from the school.

Collection of Legal Notebooks. CU Notes D922 1883. Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, Columbia Law School.

This collection was used to find Dunning's notes from John W. Burgess' 1883-1884 lecture at the Columbia Law School titled "Constitutional History of Europe."

Collection of University Bulletins. Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

This is not an officially titled or organized collection. The Rare Books and Manuscript Library holds multiple shelves of University Bulletins from past years.

Dunning '81 Alumni File, Dartmouth College Alumni Records Office, Dartmouth College.

The alumni file of Dunning was used in order to accurately present how Dunning was kicked out of Dartmouth. The information from the file was also used to create a narrative introduction of this paper.

Frederic Bancroft papers, 1890-1930. MS#0065. Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

The Frederic Bancroft papers were used to find Dunning's letters to Bancroft. The items that were examined were all located in boxes 40 and 41.

William Archibald Dunning records, 1900-1920. MS#0372. Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

Most of the archival material comes from this collection. Columbia's Rare Books and Manuscript Library indicates online that there are two collections: William Archibald

Dunning records and William Archibald Dunning papers, but the latter actually doesn't exist and the former is the only available at Columbia.

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