

**Columbia University and Domestic Slavery:
Violence, Resistance, Female Slaveholders,
and the Projection of Civility and Domesticity**

Keziah Anderson

Columbia University and Slavery

Final Paper

Introduction:

Founded in 1754, King's College--which was later renamed Columbia College in 1784--was a hub for elite New Yorkers, like the Jay, Philipse, and Livingston families. King's College--and later Columbia College--affiliates were heavily involved in elite circles in New York City, sitting on boards for other institutions, hosting parties for elite New Yorkers, and attending events throughout the city. Currently, there is a gap in historical inquiry into the role the labor of domestic slaves played in facilitating events for elite New Yorkers, establishing the position of elite families in New York City before Columbia College's founding, and supporting Columbia College students while on campus.

This paper will examine domestic slavery in New York City, and more specifically the role of domestic slavery in maintaining the appearance of civility and elitism in the homes of individuals connected with King's College and King College's campus. This research project will also examine the role played by female slave-owners in domestic slavery in colonial New York and will examine the violence that domestic slaves faced while performing their labor. This paper will argue that the labor performed by domestic slaves was central to the reinforcement of class boundaries in New York City; to facilitating leisurely events that bonded Columbia College students and other New York City elites; and in supporting students in completing their studies while on campus. This paper will also argue that domestic slaves faced severe violence throughout their enslavement and used their particular proximity to their masters in their resistance from their bondage. Further, my paper will argue that white women played an active role in commanding the labor of domestic slaves, in holding slaves as property, in capturing runaway slaves, and in passing their ownership of slaves to other white women. Overall, my paper will demonstrate that the labor of domestic slaves, which adorned, cleaned, and refined events and households of Columbia College students and the students themselves, helped to project an image of Columbia College as a civilized and benevolent space.

In this paper, I will examine the central role that domestic slaves played in facilitating leisurely events and everyday activities for New York City's white elite class, and Columbia College students more specifically, through analysis of two primary accounts of enslaved people's labor. I will consult the depiction of a candle-dip party hosted in the home of a Columbia College student in 1798 and the recounting of domestic labor as performed by George Washington's step-son's personal slave while he was a student on campus. I will further consult runaway slave advertisements, advertisements selling slaves, and final wills and testaments left by male and female slaveholders to gain a broader picture of the violence faced by domestic slaves, the labor and skills domestic slaves performed, the ways in which domestic slaves resisted their enslavement, and the central and active role white mistresses played in enslaving Afro-Americans in New York City.

Joe: A Domestic Slave at Columbia:

_____When John Parke Custis, George Washington's step-son and King's College student, was enrolled in King's College in 1773, he brought along his personal slave, Joe, with him. Joe lived in Custis's "parlor" with him while Custis completed his studies. According to a letter written by Custis to Martha Washington, Joe lived with Custis in his two-bedroom suite provided by King's College. In the letter, Custis also outlines that Joe made him breakfast every morning immediately following his return from service in the school chapel in the morning. Following his breakfast, Custis outlines that he attended his classes, took walks around campus, dined with his professors, and studied every night.¹ While a student, Custis also sent Joe to Annapolis to serve as an intermediary between

¹ John Parke Custis to Mrs. Martha Washington, July 5th, 1773, in *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers: 1770-1774*, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898-1902), 233.

himself and George and Martha Washington, assisting in delivering letters and messages.² Although Custis does not mention it by name, Joe most certainly assisted Custis in cleaning his suite, relaying communications with fellow students and other affiliates on campus, arranging Custis's affairs, and cooking other meals for Custis. Further, Joe may have assisted Custis while in class or by walking him to class, carrying his things and keeping him organized for the day. However, if Joe did not accompany Custis to class throughout the day, one can only imagine how he may have made use of his free time. Glymph notes that domestic slaves often made use of any alone time they had to attend to their own private affairs, possibly spending time with family or friends or developing skills they may have used to make their own money separate from their masters.³

In the example of Joe's time as a personal slave to John Parke Custis on King's College's campus itself, it is clear that slaves also supported the everyday functioning of King's College students. Joe's labor, in cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, traveling, and sending messages for Custis, eased John Custis's life while on campus. Thus, Joe's labor--and the labor of other domestic personal slaves lost from the archives--was a monumental component of students' time on campus, allowing students to present themselves as put together on the backs of slaves' labor. Further, the labor of slaves allowed for students to enjoy more time for leisure, studying, and connecting with students and professors. In this way, the labor of Joe and of other domestic slaves aided in civilizing Columbia College as a whole, allowing students to both present themselves as high-class and engage in more posh and cultural activities.

² John Parke Custis to George Washington, February 20th, 1774, in *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers: 1770-1774*, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898-1902), 336.

³ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 72-3.

William Rhinelander's Candle-Dip Frolic: Examining the Centrality of Slave Labor in Leisure Activities Among Columbia College Affiliates:

Slaves not only provided essential labor on everyday activities; they also labored at events for Columbia College affiliates and elite New Yorkers. In a collection of family stories written in 1903, the niece of Columbia College Class of 1798 member David Codwise describes an extravagant party hosted on an evening in 1796 while he was a Columbia student.⁴ Columbia College students and other New York City elites gathered for a “candle-dipping frolic” in the mansion of William Rhinelander, another member of Columbia College’s Class of 1798.⁵ At the event, hosted primarily by female Rhinelander family members and attended by thirty-two elite white couples, white Columbia affiliates, and other elite white New Yorkers dipped candles with precise form; ate extravagant food, including cold “fowl and game,” “cold roasts of beef and spare ribs,” hot sausages, meat roulades, pastries, a variety of cakes, wine, and eggnog; and danced with one another to “clear” and “rich” music played on fiddles.⁶ The candle-dip party lasted over six hours, beginning at approximately six in the evening and ending after midnight.⁷ This elaborate event brought together elite New Yorkers, including Columbia students and affiliates, and reinforced cultural norms and class boundaries in 18th century New York City. This high-class event did not realize on its own, however. The strenuous, unpaid, and often invisible labor of slaves facilitated the leisurely, pleasurable, and intimate candle-dip frolic for Columbia College students.

⁴ “Catalogue of the Governors, Trustees, and Officers, and of the Alumni and Other Graduates, of Columbia College (Originally King’s College), in the City of New York, from 1754 to 1882,” in *Catalogue of the Governors, Trustees & Officers & of the Alumni & Other Graduates, Columbia College (Originally King’s College) in the City of New York, from 1754 to 1882*, 1882, 56.

⁵ “Catalogue of the Governors, Trustees, and Officers, and of the Alumni and Other Graduates, of Columbia College,” 56.

⁶ Helen Evertson Smith, *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered From Family Papers* (New York: The Century Co., 1900), 317-327.

⁷ Smith, *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered From Family Papers*, 317-327.

Four known slaves worked the candle-dip event, described in a recounting of the event as “black Phyllis and Chloe” and “big and jolly black Castor and Pollux.”⁸ At the event, Phyllis and Chloe, wearing “butternut homespuns with white kerchiefs over the shoulders” and “red-and-yellow plaided turbans,” “deftly handed” four to five candle rods to guests “as soon as they were seated.”⁹ The seemingly prompt and precise labor on the part of Phyllis and Chloe facilitated the main event of the evening--candle-dipping--for the elite white guests with ease. Castor and Pollux performed strenuous and meticulous labor in preparing the materials for the main event of the night as well. In preparation, Castor and Pollux are described as “lift[ing] from the fire the brass kettles full of melted tallow, and deftly pour[ing] their contents to the depth of two or three inches more than a long candle’s length upon the water with which the similar vessels on the floor were already filled.”¹⁰ In pouring the wax for candle-dipping so precisely, Castor and Pollux not only strained their bodies but teetered along lines of expectations for their labor--pouring their materials for the guests in precise and exact ways. Further, Castor and Pollux were the only sources of music for the entire night. They played their fiddles for hours for guests, playing beautiful songs for the couples to dance along to. In playing the music for this extravagant party, one can only imagine the pressures that Castor and Pollux felt to please the guests, having to adapt music to the hours-long dancing festivities throughout the evening. Throughout the evening, Castor and Pollux had to balance both their creativity and knowledge of music with the recommendations and expectations of guests and their masters who hosted the party to promote an atmosphere that allowed for couples to drink, dance, and socialize with one another.

Although no direct descriptions are given of slaves serving food and drinks, cleaning, or speaking to and entertaining guests, one can imagine that the lavish and large selection of food and

⁸ Smith, *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered from Family Papers*, 319-320.

⁹ Smith, *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered from Family Papers*, 320.

¹⁰ Smith, *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered from Family Papers*, 319.

drinks served at the party were prepared and served by slaves; that enslaved people cleaned and decorated the mansion before, during, and after the party; and that slaves served guests of the party throughout the night. The lack of description of the labor performed at the party highlights the ways in which enslaved people's labor at leisurely and lavish events was erased. It is highly likely that more than just four slaves tended the event, with more slaves preparing and serving food, pouring drinks, and cleaning up after and entertaining guests. It is even possible that other guests may have brought a slave or two of their own to the event to tend to their own needs. Tracking the ways in which the labor of domestic slaves is silenced even in the narrative of the candle-dip party, which includes descriptions of "jolly" and attentive slaves, is vital as it may indicate the ways in which the households of Columbia affiliates were framed as both lavish and spaces of benevolent slave ownership with compliant slaves. These silences of certain forms of domestic labor at the event--and particularly the erasure of the labor associated with domestic tasks that weren't central to the most engaging activities of the night, dancing and candle-dipping--illustrate the ways in which the labor performed by domestic slaves on a daily basis, like cooking, tending to masters, cleaning, and ironing clothes, were ignored and erased at the event. In *Out of the House of Bondage*, historian Thavolia Glymph notes that domestic labor performed by slaves was often shrouded and framed as having been completed by the white mistresses who commanded their labor in order to uphold presentations of civility within slaveholding households.¹¹

Notably, in the description of the slave's behavior at the party, David Codwise's niece describes Phyllis, Chole, Castor, and Pollux as jubilant, prompt, and diligent in their work. Her characterizations of the slaves neglected any negative descriptions of their behavior or the quality of their work. Through these descriptors, two trends can be recognized. First, the slaves of William Rhinelanders may have *presented* themselves as happy and performed their labor with an outwardly

¹¹ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 22.

positive attitude to avoid punishment from their owners. Secondly, such depictions of the outward attitudes of slaves may also be indicative of the ways in which the attitudes of slaves were selectively presented in order to stage slaveholding households as benevolent and private spaces free from the abuses associated with commanding the labor of slaves for production.¹² Surely the four slaves mentioned, along with other unnamed slaves, continued to labor after the event, cleaning up after guests and attending to the needs of their masters--who may have been drunk and belligerent after drinking and dancing all night.

These slaves likely witnessed and were tasked with beautifying the consequences of the drinking, partying, fighting, and candle-dipping of guests. They may have cleaned up vomit from drunk guests, plates, silverware, cups, broken glasses, and spilled wax, under the command of their masters and mistresses in order to maintain the appearance of domesticity within their master's household.¹³ From the short descriptions of enslaved peoples' role in the recounting of the candle-dip party, it is clear that the slaves of a Columbia College student provided essential, demanding, and strenuous labor that facilitated an event to reinforce the social norms among Columbia College students and other New York City elites. The perception of the slaves as "jolly" and performing their labor promptly and exactly was also integral to the function of the event--underscoring not only the vital nature of the physical labor of slaves but also the ways in which white guests interpreted their behavior while serving at the event. In other words, presenting slaves as content and thorough was an integral part of uniting Columbia College affiliates and other elite New Yorkers around an image of civility and ease, an image that could be easily destroyed if the violence faced by slaves was acknowledged. Thus, in couching the labor of domestic slaves in the language of benevolence and submission and in partaking in activities supported by the labor of these slaves,

¹² Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 3.

¹³ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 65.

Columbia College affiliates were able to project an image of civility for the college as a whole.

Despite the presentation of William Rhinelander's slaves as cheerful, his slaves and other slaves of Columbia College affiliates resisted their enslavement.

Only six years prior to the grand candle-dip frolic, on July 14, 1790, an eleven-year-old Afro-American girl ran away from William Rhinelander's "sugar house" on King George Street. In a runaway slave advertisement submitted by William Rhinelander one day after her escape, Kate is described as "handsome." The day Kate ran away, she was wearing a red petticoat, a "dark striped cotton frock," and "a straw hat bound with black ribbon."¹⁴ In her eleven year-old hands, she carried "another striped frock, green cloth cloak, and several checked aprons" as she escaped from bondage.¹⁵ After placing the first advertisement encouraging Kate's capture, William Rhinelander continued to advertise for her capture on two other print dates within the same week.¹⁶ At the time Kate ran away, it was highly unusual for female slaves, let alone female enslaved children, to escape from bondage in New York.¹⁷ Most runaway slaves were young adult men, and if children did run away from slavery, they often fled with their mothers or other adults.¹⁸ In fact, from 1786-1795, of the 251 runaway slaves in New York and New Jersey, only 33 known runaway slaves were below the age of 15 and solely 19.5% of all runaway slaves in New York and New Jersey were female.¹⁹

¹⁴ William Rhinelander, "A Negro Girl Run Away," Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1790, 3. America's Historical Newspapers Database.

¹⁵ William Rhinelander, "A Negro Girl Run Away," Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1790, 3. America's Historical Newspapers Database.

¹⁶ William Rhinelander, "A Negro Girl Run Away," Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1790, 3. America's Historical Newspapers Database.;

William Rhinelander, "A Negro Girl Run Away," Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 16, 1790, 3. America's Historical Newspapers Database.;

William Rhinelander, "A Negro Girl Run Away," Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 19, 1790, 3. America's Historical Newspapers Database.

¹⁷ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African-Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 47.

¹⁸ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 62.

¹⁹ Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 143.

Further, Kate fled from bondage at a rare time in New York, as less than 25 known slaves ran away from their masters in New York and New Jersey in 1790.²⁰ As a young child running for her life and her freedom on her own, Kate may have used her youth to her advantage, using the gullibility of whites and her young appearance to escape from Rhineland.²¹

Because of the nature of the advertisement, which was written by Kate's master in an attempt to reclaim her as his property, it is difficult to know why she ran away from bondage. Perhaps she was physically or sexually abused by William Rhineland or other white New Yorkers and felt that escape was her only path to safety. Perhaps an eleven-year-old Kate sought to reunite with her parents after being separated from them at auction. Perhaps Kate ran away with hopes of reuniting with family and friends for weeks or months, or maybe she had hopes of running away to permanent freedom. In New York and New Jersey, many slaveholders would indicate why they thought their slaves ran away, underscoring that they may have run away to visit family members and other slaves, to pass as free, or to avoid punishment.²² However, as noted by Shane White, some masters provided no reasoning for why their slaves ran away and saw the actions of their runaways "utterly perplexing," feeling that their slaves "recognized their good intentions and reciprocated with feelings of affection."²³ What is clear is that Kate, as an eleven year-old girl--an extreme rarity among runaway slaves in New York City in 1790--was desperate to be free from her master and from bondage for a reason, despite her master's confusion around her motivation for running. As a small child, she risked her life in her pursuit of freedom from Columbia College student William Rhineland and managed to avoid capture for at least four days. She risked severe punishment if caught, including possibly being separated from her friends and family, violent punishment, and

²⁰ White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 141.

²¹ White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 123.

²² White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 126-7.

²³ White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 126.

being sold to harsher owners.²⁴ As a child running away on her own, she certainly felt anxious, scared, and confused, cognizant that her identity as a slave could be discovered at any moment.

Despite the attempts by Columbia College affiliates and other elite New Yorkers to present the household and domestic slavery as benevolent and gentle, domestic slaves constantly resisted their enslavement. The runaway slave advertisement of Kate, a young female slave of the host of the event, only a few years prior to the candle-dip party indicates that domestic slaves themselves were not content with their enslavement and rippled the presentation of domestic slavery as a domestic institution through their resistance. The event held in the Rhinelander mansion and Kate's running away from bondage only provide a small glimpse into the role domestic slaves played in upholding Columbia College, Columbia College affiliates, and elite New Yorkers more broadly and of the ways in which domestic slaves resisted the abuses in which they were subjected.

Runaway Slave Advertisements: Tracing Resistance of and Violence Faced By Domestic Slaves:

Although there are very few sources created in the 1700s by slaves themselves to express their feelings about slavery or indicate their resistance, runaway slave advertisements give some indication of the ways in which slaves resisted bondage. In order to trace a larger picture of the lives of domestic slaves--including the labor they performed, who commanded their labor, and the ways in which they both suffered and were subjected to violence--runaway slave advertisements will be essential. Runaway slave advertisements will provide foundational knowledge of the ways in which domestic slaves resisted their enslavement and suffered violence at the hands of their masters. This paper will rely heavily on Jordan Brewington's prior research into runaway slave advertisements of slaves of Columbia College affiliates and runaway slave advertisements of slaves in New York more

²⁴ White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 139.

broadly. The runaway slave advertisements, found in New York newspapers, often include descriptions of slaves' appearance (including identifiable marks that could indicate violence or abuse at the hands of masters), if slaves had any children, and if masters had any ideas for why their slaves ran away. Runaway slave advertisements often highlight more negative traits of slaves, like if they drink alcohol or talk back, and underscore skills that would be valuable when running away, such as language skills or skills like welding that could provide them with sources of income while on the run. Because of the nature of runaway slave advertisements, it is often difficult to confirm that a slave would work within the household or in domestic spheres, as owners often did not recognize cooking, cleaning, sewing, or child-rearing skills as important in identifying slaves. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I will examine runaway slave advertisements of Columbia College affiliates and New York City more broadly for indications of violence, abuse, and resistance.

As noted in Jordan Brewington's original research, among the 44 known runaway slave advertisements placed by Columbia College affiliates, roughly half mention physical deformities of slaves.²⁵ Some of the deformities mentioned in runaway slave advertisements of Columbia College affiliates certainly not only caused enslaved people pain, but affected their ability to perform their labor as well. In runaway slave advertisements placed by Columbia affiliates, slaves are described as having pain in their feet that is so severe that they have trouble walking, missing teeth, red in their eyes, and "toes so tender in the front that he has to split his shoes."²⁶ One Columbia College Class of 1789 member, Henry Izard, had even admitted to branding a runaway slave on the cheek. It is

²⁵ Jordan Brewington, "'Run-away from the Subscriber': Resistance Against King's College and Columbia Slave-owning Students and Affiliates from the Class of 1760 to 1805," *Columbia University and Slavery*, <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/student-research/run-away-subscriber-resistance-against-kings-college-and-columbia-slave-owning-students-and#/ftn58>.

²⁶ Charles Doughty, "Run-away from Charles Doughty," *New York Mercury*, May 12, 1766.; Elbert Herring, "Run away from the Subscriber," *New York Gazette*, August 22, 1763.; Robert G. Livingston, "Twenty Dollars Reward," *County Journal*, August 2, 1786.; Henry Izard, "Twenty Dollars Reward," *New York Morning Post*, June 27, 1785.

clear, then, that the slaves of Columbia College affiliates experienced injury throughout their lives and that slave-owning Columbia College affiliates asserted physical violence over their slaves.

In New York more broadly, known domestic slaves are also described as experiencing horrendous deformities and injuries. For example, in a runaway slave advertisement for a slave named Philis placed in January of 1773, the female slave is described as running away on December 25th, Christmas day. A cook, she is described as wearing a “light colored calamanco gown,” “a checked apron, a black silk coat, and a black peelong bonnet.” In the advertisement, placed by a white woman named Mary Exceen, Philis is described as being “marked on the forehead with a diamond” and as having “lost several of her fingers on each hand, and also some of her toes.”²⁷ This runaway slave advertisement exemplifies the severe violence to which enslaved female domestic slaves were subjected. For Philis, her injuries not only served as daily reminders of her bondage but also hindered her ability to complete her work as a domestic slave. One can only imagine the ways in which Philis had to adjust to her multiple missing appendages when cooking for her owners. Her advertisement indicates the ways in which white women not only participated in commanding the labor of domestic slaves, but in exerting power and violence over them as well, as the advertisement for the runaway slave was placed by her female owner. In this way, white women in New York were not merely inactive participants in slavery or victims to white men, but exerted their power as mistresses over their Afro-American female domestic slaves, subjecting them to violence and actively participating in their capture after they ran away. This underscores an observation made by Glymph about white mistresses in the antebellum South: that white mistresses could be just as, if

²⁷ Mary Exceen, “RUNAWAY from the Subscriber, on the 25th of December last,” *The New-York Gazette*, January 4, 1773, in *“Pretends to be Free”: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*, ed. By Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 166.

not more, violent than male slaveholders and that they wielded their power as slave-owners to violently and brutally command the labor of female slaves.²⁸

Further, runaway slave advertisements exemplify how female domestic slaves may have utilized their proximity and intimacy with their owners when running away. For example, in an advertisement placed by the father of Columbia College Class of 1795 student, Elbert Herring, a female slave named Vilet is described as possibly having taken with her men's clothes, including a pair of boots and a blue coat, in an attempt to pass for a man in her escape from bondage. In the advertisement, Vilet, who squints with one eye, is described as having shaved her hair, perhaps in an attempt to further pass as a man while running away.²⁹ This strategy proved useful for Vilet, as Herring continued to search for her in January, three months after her initial escape in November. Although Herring does not directly indicate if Vilet specialized in any domestic skills, her runaway slave advertisement may provide a glimpse into the possible ways in which female domestic slaves wielded their proximity to their masters in their escape. In Vilet's case, access to male clothing seems to have made a difference in her escape, allowing her to not have been caught for three months. For a runaway slave, closeness to their masters' clothing--and possibly even creating their clothing themselves--could have provided unique access to escape methods involving bending normative gender constructions. Thus, runaway slave advertisements indicate that domestic slaves may have used their intimate contact with their masters in their escape, ultimately resisting their enslavement by using the particular forms of labor they were forced to perform to their own benefit.

Eleven-year-old Kate also seems to have weaponized her proximity to clothing as a slave, perhaps indicating that she was a domestic slave as well. In her advertisement, Rhinelanders does not describe her personality but instead focuses intently on the precise clothing she wore, down to the

²⁸ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 4-5.

²⁹ Elbert Herring, "Run Away in November Last," *New York Gazette*, January 17, 1763.

color of the ribbon in her straw hat, the color of her petticoat, and the pattern on her dress. Further, Rhinelander underscores that she took with her several other articles of clothing, including multiple aprons and another striped dress.³⁰ In New York City more broadly, domestic slaves were able to plot their escape around their access to clothing. In a slave advertisement from a slaveholder in New York unaffiliated with Columbia, a “tall slim” female domestic slave named Pegg is described as having runaway wearing a red cloak, white hat, and pair of men’s shoes. Further, her owner, John Leversage, describes Pegg as taking with her “her callico gown and a variety of clothes.”³¹ As a forty-year-old “sensible,” “cunning and artful” slave that could “wash iron and cook,” Pegg was certainly able to plan her escape around her access to clothing in the domestic realm.

The runaway slave advertisement calling for Pegg’s capture indicates how access to the clothing of slave-owners, by washing and ironing them as a part of commanded labor, allowed for female domestic slaves in New York City to plan their escapes around access to both an abundance of clothing and particular articles of clothing. Like with Vilet, Kate’s and Pegg’s ability to not only take with them outfits on their bodies, but also unusual accessories--like Kate’s ribbon-bound straw hat--and several extra changes of clothes may signal how domestic slaves used their particular position to resist against their masters. The closeness domestic slaves experienced to practical supplies, like clothing, gave domestic slaves access to supplies that could be used by long-term runaway slaves. Kate was even able to take with her a straw hat--a valuable item for a runaway slave on the run in the July sun. Domestic slaves resisted their enslavement by using their closeness to

³⁰ William Rhinelander, “A Negro Girl Run Away,” Advertisement, *The Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1790, 3.

³¹ John Leversage, “Run away, last night the 12th instant,” *The New-York Gazette*, December 13, 1764, in *“Pretends to be Free”: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*, ed. By Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 166.

their masters and their involvement in domestic labor, like sewing, cleaning, and ironing clothes in planning and executing their escapes.

Selling Domestic Slaves: Gendered Punishment and Tracing the Value of Domestic Labor:

This paper will also rely on advertisements selling domestic slaves. These sources present the appearance, skills, and personalities of enslaved people. Unlike runaway slave advertisements, advertisements selling slaves do not tend to present negative personality traits or physical deformities of slaves. With an advertisement selling slaves, one would expect a master to neglect any traits that may degrade the value of the slave property they hope to sell. Thus, one would expect an owner to neglect any mention that a slave might talk back, be a frequent runaway, or have a limp or other disability. Instead, one would expect an owner selling a slave to underscore positive traits of slaves, such as special skills, disease immunities, and positive personality traits.

In an advertisement selling a female domestic slave in 1734, twenty years before the founding of King's College, John McLennan publicized putting a twenty-year-old "Negro Woman" up for sale. In the advertisement, McLennan, an individual unaffiliated with King's College, states that the slave could cook boiled or roasted food "pretty well;" calls her a "good dairy woman;" says she was skilled in soap-making; highlights her ability to wash, iron, and starch clothing; and states that she could card and spin wool, twine, and cotton. McLennan also indicates that the unnamed slave was quiet, healthy, strong, and did not smoke or drink alcohol. The advertisement reveals that the enslaved woman lived on the "upper End of Beaver Street, near the Royal Bowling Green" with her owner.³² This slave advertisement presents some of the labor performed by enslaved women within households in New York City in the colonial period. The advertisement demonstrates that

³² John McLennan, "To be sold, a young Negro Woman," *The New York Weekly Journal*, September 30, 1734, 4.

slaveholding households relied on the labor of domestic slaves to maintain their households, in terms of managing and providing their households with food and clothing, keeping the homes of slaveholders presentable, and even providing their owners with the necessary means for bathing.

Further, the mere fact that this young enslaved woman was up for sale--and that her skills as a domestic laborer were highlighted in the advertisement--demonstrates that the special skills that female domestic slaves acquired were valuable on the market even before King's College was founded. In the colonial period, the labor of domestic slaves like McLennon's would have played prominent roles in maintaining the households of the New York City elite and later founders of King's College, like Philip Livingston and the Philipse family. The labor of enslaved domestic laborers, like the one sold by McLennon, thus, were integral to beautifying and cleaning the homes of white families in New York City. Not only did these enslaved domestic laborers keep homes presentable, however. They were also foundational to ensuring that their owners themselves could present themselves in particular ways in public, making, cleaning, and ironing clothes for their owners, and even producing soap for their owners to maintain their cleanliness. In the colonial period, this labor by slaves would have, thus, helped to establish the boundaries of societal norms and class distinctions.

In an advertisement placed in 1735, a white female slaveholder named Mary Kippin placed an unnamed female slave who is around 30 years old up for sale. She underscores that the slave has good English skills, has been trained in household duties, and is a "fine" cook. Further, the advertisement notes that the enslaved woman "has now a Young Child."³³ In a 1747 advertisement, an unnamed slaveholder placed a "healthy" and "strong" female slave that can do all manner of domestic work up for sale in New York City. The advertisement, like the one placed by Mary Kippin

³³ Mary Kippin, "'To be sold, a very likely Negro Woman, about 30 Years of Age,'" *The New York Weekly Journal*, April 28, 1735.

in 1735, notes that the female slave has a child with her. There are very limited details in the advertisement, as the advertisement gives no indication of the enslaved woman's place of birth, special skills, language skills, age, or name. The slave advertisement selling a female domestic slave in 1747 is extremely stark in that it does little to influence confidence in the purchase, as the owner only spends one sentence describing the slave, with no description of her personality or of the quality of her work in the domestic sphere. The advertisement, thus, indicates that the owner may either be in a rush to sell the slave or not truly want the slave to be sold. Perhaps the owner wrote the advertisement after feeling embarrassed because of circumstances surrounding their slave. It is of particular note that in both the 1735 and 1747 advertisements selling female slaves, the slaves are noted as having newly young children.

Both of these advertisements attempt to sell women with very young children. In the advertisement placed by Mary Kippin, the new child that the slave had given birth to seems to be of importance in her selling. As the advertisement is placed by a mistress, it raises questions about why the slave-holding woman felt the need to sell her female slave and the slave's young child shortly after the child was born. In the 1747 advertisement selling a female slave, the child is also one of the only details included about the slave. Perhaps, then, the advertisements indicate that the slave-owners felt a need to sell their slaves because of circumstances surrounding the birth of the slaves' children. Maybe the enslaved women sold with newly-born slave children gave birth to children resembling their masters, leading to jealousy among mistresses.³⁴ Perhaps slave-owners felt that the enslaved women were not as productive after giving birth. Regardless, it is evident that in colonial

³⁴ Harriet Ann Jacobs, "The Jealous Mistress," in *Incidents in the Life of the Slave Girl* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/JACOBS/hjch6.htm>.

In *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Ann Jacobs underscores the ways in which jealousy on the part of mistresses after sexual relations between masters and slaves could break slave families apart and lead to the selling of female slaves.

New York City, having young children could greatly affect the lives of enslaved female domestic slaves and put them at increased risk of being sold on the market.

Columbia College students also sold domestic slaves on the market. James Barclay, a King's College Class of 1766 member, sold a large number of slaves throughout his lifetime, including several female slaves along with their children. For example, in April of 1785, he sold a "Negro wench" and her six month-old son, along with non-human items like ribbons, stockings, and blankets.³⁵ Strikingly, Barclay's slave advertisement of the mother and her six month-old child lacks a detailed and thorough description of the slave's abilities or personality, with more space granted to describing the non-human goods also sold at his brokerage office. In January of 1786, he put a thirty year-old enslaved woman described as a "complete cook" who "understands all housework" up for sale. Devastatingly, Barclay placed her on the market with her fourteen year-old daughter skilled in housework and especially in raising children. Further, the thirty year-old woman's five year-old and three year-old sons are also placed for sale on the market. James Barclay, their owner and a member of the Columbia College Class of 1766, notes that the slaves are sold "for no fault" but does not include a request that they be purchased together as a unit, putting the woman and her children up for risk of being sold separately.³⁶

The advertisements placed by James Barclay demonstrate the direct ties between Columbia College affiliates and the psychological abuse of and separating of families of domestic slaves. In directly selling these slaves, and particularly mothers with their young children, Barclay was certainly directly exposed to the pain and trauma caused by his participation in the slave system. In these advertisements, enslaved women are sold with young children, similar to the advertisements from

³⁵ James Barclay, "FOR SALE, AT James Barclay's Commission and Brokerage OFFICE," *New York Morning Post*, April 21, 1785.

³⁶ James Barclay, "TO BE SOLD, AT PRIVATE SALE A NEGRO WENCH," *Independent Journal*, January 18, 1786.

the 1730s and 1740s explored above. These enslaved women sold with their young children were subjected to increased psychological trauma as they were at risk of being sold away from their own children, losing access to their children and hearing their screams and statements of worry and concern. The advertisement selling the mother along with her 14 year-old daughter exemplifies the ways in which young female domestic slave girls may have been used for their ability to reproduce, as the mother in the 1786 advertisement was pregnant with her teenage daughter at around the age of fifteen. The advertisement further demonstrates a prized skill among female domestic slaves--the ability to rear children. These advertisements demonstrate, thus, that enslaved girls and women were not only valued, in part, because of their ability to reproduce, but also in their ability to help raise the children of their masters.

Wills and Testaments of Slaveholders:

There are many misconceptions about white mistresses in the United States. Past scholarship has framed white female slaveholders as closeted abolitionists, gentle with their slaves, and completely powerless because of their subjugation to white men. However, analysis of the last wills and testaments of both male and female slaveholders in New York demonstrate the power white women held over their slaves and the ways in which they chose to embrace their ultimate power of ownership. White males slaveholders often leave their slaves to female family members. Many male slaveholders leave portions of their slave property with their widows, for the duration of their widowhood.³⁷ Further, many women themselves owned slaves, and thus chose their slaves' fate at

³⁷ Zebulon Dickenson, "Last Will and Testament of Zebulon Dickenson," dated July 29, 1751, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 372.

Samuel Stringham, "Last Will and Testament of Samuel Stringham," dated May 14, 1752, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 386-87.

Richard Seaman, "Last Will and Testament of Richard Seaman," dated April 17, 1752, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 387-89.

their death. Despite some assumptions by earlier scholars that enslaved women were closeted abolitionists or felt some connection to their slaves, many -- if not most -- mistresses did not free their slaves at their death. In fact, of the volume of wills and testaments accessed for my research, only one slave-owning woman, named Elizabeth Viellet, directly set her four slaves free at her death.³⁸ On the contrary, slaveholding women passed down their slaves to other relatives and friends, consolidating property-ownership in slaves among white New Yorkers. For example, Susanna Tull, a female slaveholder from New York left her niece, Susanah, both a male and female slave and gave her sister, Elsie, a female and male slave as well.³⁹ After being left three slaves by her husband in his will, Phebe Tredwell left at least one of her male slaves to a friend, Jacob Smith.⁴⁰ Neeltie Pawling was left one female slave named Bess to “wait on her” in her son, Albert Pawling’s, will in 1745.⁴¹ Philip Livingston, one of the founders of King’s College, witnessed several wills passing on slaves as property, demonstrating the deep connections Columbia College affiliates had to making profit off of the trauma of enslaved people left to new owners in wills.⁴² Albert Pawling’s choice to leave his mother a specific slave to wait on her in her old age demonstrates the centrality of domestic slaves in the lives of white female New Yorkers in the period immediately preceding the founding of King’s College. The trends in last wills and testaments overall demonstrate that white women in slave-holding homes were not closeted abolitionists waiting to free their slaves after their

³⁸ Elizabeth Viellet, “Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth Viellet,” dated May 3, 1750, proved November 12, 1750, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 310.

³⁹ Susanna Tull, “Last Will and Testament of Susanna Tull,” dated August 26, 1750, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 352.

⁴⁰ Phebe Tredwell, “Last Will and Testament of Phebe Tredwell,” dated August 3, 1748, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 196-7.

John Tredwell, “Last Will and Testament of John Tredwell,” dated July 23, 1745, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 150-1.

⁴¹ Albert Pawling, “Last Will and Testament of Albert Pawling,” dated August 27, 1745, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 63-4.

⁴² Barent Vroman, “Last Will and Testament of Barent Vroman,” dated April 14, 1749, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 213-4.

husbands' deaths or their deaths. Instead, the wills demonstrate that white women wielded power over enslaved Afro-Americans, passed slaveholding down to other white women, and relied on the labor of slaves after the deaths of their husbands.

Conclusion:

It is clear through a thorough analysis of archival evidence from colonial New York's history of slaveholding that legacies of elite institutions, like Columbia University, rest on the labor of enslaved people. Further, although white women were not able to partake in the educational resources of Columbia University, they also benefited from the labor of slaves in elite colonial society in New York. Further, white women were central to the violence and exploitation of domestic slaves through the ownership of slaves, violence against slaves, and the use of their labor. Further, domestic slaves--whose labor constructed cultural norms for the elite social class of New York City--were subjected to violence and resisted their enslavement. Thus, although white elite New Yorkers presented domestic slavery and the institutions upheld by the labor of domestic slaves as benevolent and civil--in an attempt to present Columbia and New York City's elite circles in the same vein--domestic slavery was anything but. Slaves constantly resisted their bondage and made use of the particular forms of proximity their labor afforded them in resisting their enslavement.

It is critical to note that because of the historical erasure of certain voices from primary source evidence, it is impossible to fully analyze the impacts of slavery in colonial New York and at King's College. In particular, there is a lack of archival evidence into the lives of slaves outside of the views of their masters. For instance, if there was more evidence from the perspective of slaves historians might be able to understand how slaves engaged with King's College and the education that their owners were exposed to. For example, it could be interesting to explore if slaves engaged

in learning alongside their owners in classes or while they studied. Further, perhaps historians might be able to understand how slaves interacted with one another within domestic spheres, perhaps at parties or in educational settings.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

- Barclay, James. "FOR SALE, AT James Barclay's Commission and Brokerage OFFICE." *New York Morning Post*, April 21, 1785.
- Barclay, James. "TO BE SOLD, AT PRIVATE SALE A NEGRO WENCH." *Independent Journal*, January 18, 1786.
- Custis, John Parke to George Washington, February 20th, 1774. In *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers: 1770-1774*. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898-1902).
- Custis, John Parke to Mrs. Martha Washington, July 5th, 1773. In *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers: 1770-1774*. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898-1902).
- Dickenson, Zebulon. "Last Will and Testament of Zebulon Dickenson." Dated July 29, 1751. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.
- Doughty, Charles. "Run-away from Charles Doughty." *New York Mercury*, May 12, 1766.
- Exceen, Mary. "RUNAWAY from the Subscriber, on the 25th of December last." *The New-York Gazette*, January 4, 1773. In *"Pretends to be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*. Edited by Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994).
- Herring, Elbert. "Run away from the Subscriber," *New York Gazette*, August 22, 1763.
- Herring, Elbert. "Run Away in November Last." *New York Gazette*, January 17, 1763.
- Izard, Henry. "Twenty Dollars Reward." *New York Morning Post*, June 27, 1785.
- Jacobs, Harriet Ann. "The Jealous Mistress." In *Incidents in the Life of the Slave Girl* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/JACOBS/hjch6.htm>.
- Kippin, Mary. "To be sold, a very likely Negro Woman, about 30 Years of Age." *The New York Weekly Journal*, April 28, 1735.
- Leversage, John. "Run away, last night the 12th instant," *The New-York Gazette*, December 13, 1764. In *"Pretends to be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*. Edited by Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994).
- Livingston, Robert G. "Twenty Dollars Reward." *County Journal*, August 2, 1786.
- McLennan, John. "To be sold, a young Negro Woman." *The New York Weekly Journal*, September 30, 1734.
- Pawling, Albert. "Last Will and Testament of Albert Pawling." Dated August 27, 1745. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*;
- Rhineland, William. "A Negro Girl Run Away." *The Daily Advertiser*, July 15, 1790.
- Rhineland, William. "A Negro Girl Run Away." *The Daily Advertiser*, July 16, 1790.
- Rhineland, William. "A Negro Girl Run Away." *The Daily Advertiser*, July 19, 1790.
- Seaman, Richard. "Last Will and Testament of Richard Seaman," dated April 17, 1752, in *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*, 387-89.
- Smith, Helen Evertson. *Colonial Days & Ways as Gathered From Family Papers*. New York: The Century Co., 1900.
- Stringham, Samuel. "Last Will and Testament of Samuel Stringham." Dated May 14, 1752. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.

- Tredwell, Phebe. "Last Will and Testament of Phebe Tredwell." Dated August 3, 1748. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.
- Tredwell, John. "Last Will and Testament of John Tredwell." Dated July 23, 1745. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.
- Tull, Susanna. "Last Will and Testament of Susanna Tull." Dated August 26, 1750. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.
- Vielle, Elizabeth. "Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth Vielle." Dated May 3, 1750. Proved November 12, 1750. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.
- Vroman, Barent. "Last Will and Testament of Barent Vroman." Dated April 14, 1749. In *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office: City of New York, Volume 28*.

Secondary Sources:

- Brewington, Jordan. "Run-away from the Subscriber?: Resistance Against King's College and Columbia Slave-owning Students and Affiliates from the Class of 1760 to 1805." *Columbia University and Slavery*, <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/student-research/run-away-subscriber-resistance-against-kings-college-and-columbia-slave-owning-students-and#/ftn58>.
- Glymph, Thavolia. *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African-Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- White, Shane. *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.