

# “We Shall Have Law & Order”: Columbia College, the Seventh Regiment Militia, and the 1863 Draft Riots

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Figure 1: from left to right--James Weeks (AB 1856), Private in Company F; Stephen Burdett Hyatt (LLB 1862), Private in Company D; James Francis Ruggles (AB 1847), Sergeant in Company F; John James McLaren (AB 1847), Private in Company F.

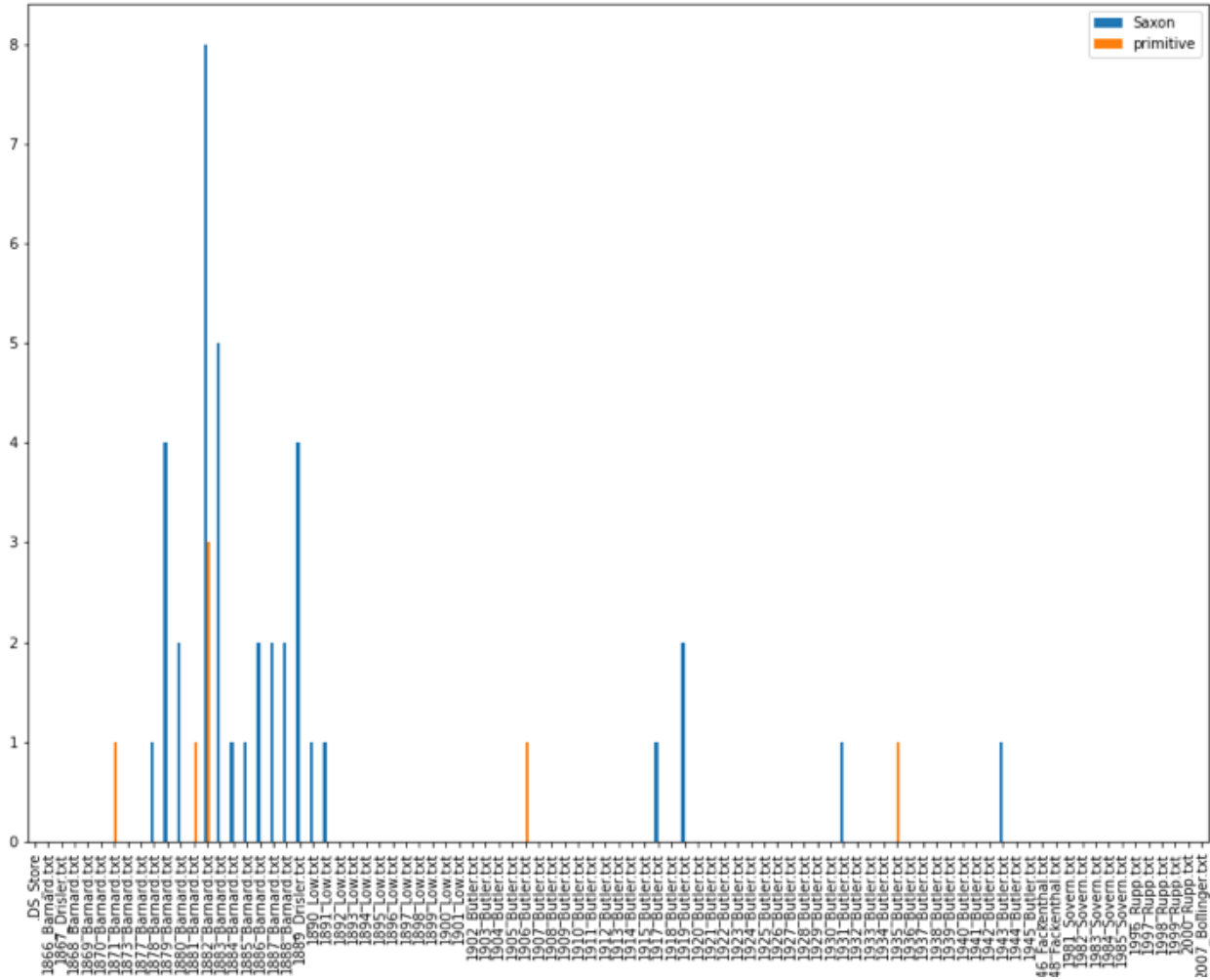


Figure 2: A Computational Linguistics Analysis of the words “Saxon” and “Primitive” of Columbia’s Annual Report of the Presidents, 1866-2007.

## Introduction: “They Filled the Board Street from Curbstone to Curbstone”

For many Columbia faculty and alumni, July 13, 1863 started as an uneventful day. Classes had just concluded three weeks ago. President Charles King had gone to Newport for vacation, leaving William G. King, his son and personal secretary, on campus.[1] Dr. John Torrey, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry and Botany and a member of the Board, traveled to the United States Assay Office in downtown Manhattan as usual for his second job; Columbia’s recent move to Forty-ninth street had forced him to commute between the two places.[2] Many alumni were still jubilant from the recent Union twin victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Just a week prior, John Jay II, grandson of the well-known Framers and President of the Union League Club, spoke at a state convention of the Union State Central Committee[3] and provided “advice and counsel” for the State as a “prominent representative loyal man.”[4] George Templeton Strong, a Columbia graduate and trustee, declared in his diary: “This ends the rebellion!”[5]

Unbeknownst to them, however, a gathering that would set off one of the deadliest riots in New York history was taking shape just blocks away. At 10 a.m., William King noticed unusual activities on the streets. To his shock and horror, a large band of “ragged, coatless, heterogeneously weaponed army” was marching down Fifth Avenue from Central Park. According to his observation, “although [they] filled the broad street from curbstone to curbstone, and was moving rapidly,” it took the group “between twenty and twenty-five minutes for it to pass a single point.”[6] Bringing down telegraph poles and destroying the Harlem & New Haven Railroad track (Park Avenue today) adjacent to Columbia’s new campus, the Irish mob eventually converged around the Nineteenth Ward draft office on Third Avenue. After a bitter and violent encounter, the mob set the draft office on fire. George Templeton Strong witnessed the aftermath of the event: “Reached the seat of war at last, Forty-sixth Street and Third Avenue. Three houses on

the Avenue and two or three on the street were burned down: engines playing on the ruins.”[7] The mob subsequently spread out, with some breaking into buildings on Lexington Avenue.

When news of the riot was reported to him at noon, Dr. Torrey did not believe it and “thought it was exaggerated.” Around the same time, a group of “furious bareheaded & coatless men,” having attacked the “row of houses” near Columbia, began to gather on the college grounds. Demanding to “know if a Republican lived there, & what the college building was used for,” they came under the windows of Torrey’s home. Determined to “burn Pres. King’s house, as he was rich, & a decided Republican,” the mob yelled aloud for “Jeff. Davis!”, while Torrey’s family hid in fear. The entire campus, valued at the time over \$681,400, was in jeopardy.[8]

For the longest time, the 1863 New York Draft Riots was treated as a “historical orphan” collectively disowned by different groups of Americans. At the most fundamental level, the riots contradicted the triumphant story of the North: How could the Union claim that it had purged the nation of its sin in blood, when, in fact, the victorious army at Gettysburg was forced to return and suppress racism at home? Also, the blatant racism displayed by the Irish American community during the riots contradicts the much romanticized “immigrants’ story.” The riots, in all its violence and spontaneity, even obfuscates the pro-labor narrative of the disciplined working-class consciousness.

While the public cast aside the draft riots as a shameful, if not subversive, event, historians generally see the riots as the symptom of long-standing social tension between the predominantly Irish-Catholic, Democratic white working class and New York’s Anglo-Protestant wealthy elites as well as the African American community. The rich documentation of the event has allowed historians to construct counternarratives that complicate the political history of the Civil War by incorporating Black and Irish Americans perspectives. Yet, in doing so, many historians have ignored the complexity of the so-called “elites” of New York in responding to the riots. As early as 1873, Joel T.

Headley published *The Great Riots of New York* detailing the stories of the riots, but Headley's work generally portrays the wealthy as monolithically pro-Union patriots. This trend has continued even in recent scholarship. For example, in *The Devil's Own Work*, Brian Schechter frames New York's social elites as reform-minded leaders who treated the draft riots not only as a localized conflict in New York City, but also as a proxy for national debates on post-war Reconstruction. Schechter parallels the Republican elites' struggle to reconstruct New York's white supremacist political culture, ultimately paralyzed by the resurgence of the Democratic Tammany Hall, with the collapse of the national Reconstruction in the South. In short, drawing on the Union League Club as an example of their political interest, Schechter assumes that the New York elites acted as a single, progressive political unit.[9]

This paper challenges this monolithic reading of New York's wealthy elites. By privileging the Columbia affiliates' writings and correspondence in the riots but reading them against the grain, this paper navigates the complexity of the elite circle and argues that Columbia's role in the draft riots was spontaneous and contradictory. Despite its unraveling relationship with the Irish neighbors during the riots, it was an Irish Catholic priest that saved the College's property; and while Columbia affiliates in the Seventh Regiment played a critical role in suppressing the riots and protecting African Americans, it was never the intended effect, but the side-effects of enforcing order. Ultimately, Columbia supported the return of law and order and the restoration of the status quo, but nothing beyond that, during and after the draft riots.

I will start the paper by situating Columbia in the mid-19th century New York. I will then discuss the triangular forces behind the draft riots—Irish American rioters, African American community, and the elite Seventh Regiment militia—and their respective ethno-religious, racial, and socioeconomic ties with Columbia. Finally, I will describe how this triangulation converged during the riots and show that Columbia, instead of being radicalized by the conflict, emerged as a conservative bastion of law and order. I

will conclude the paper by discussing the aftermath of riots and its continued impacts on the Columbia community.

## Columbia and Irish Americans: the “Hoary Old Bigots” and the “Celtic Beast”

Historically, Columbia as an institution had not been openly hostile to Irish Catholicism. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Anglophobic sentiments, in fact, created a common bond between American intellectuals and Irish nationalists. When David Bailie Warden, an exiled Irish Republican insurgent, arrived in New York in 1799, he received the “most cordial reception” from professors of the college.[10] Half a century later, when the Revolutions of 1848 swept Europe, Columbia sympathized with these liberal nationalist movements. President Charles King personally sent a letter to Lajos Kossuth, the exiled Hungarian revolutionary leader, congratulating him on “arrival in our freeland” and inviting him to visit the college so that the students might extend the “admiration of your character and of their sympathy with your suffering for Country & for Freedom.”[11]

The emergence of Irish mass migration, precipitated by the Great Famine, reshaped Columbia’s perception of the Irish American community. In 1851, William E. Robinson delivered a pro-immigration oration during a Psi Upsilon Fraternity meeting, attended by delegates from Columbia. Robinson denounced anti-Catholic prejudice, stating that “this country is not Anglo-Saxon, never was, and can never be.”[12] Irish Americans, long considered as the “blacks of Europe,” were just as eager to prove their membership in the white race. They actively joined forces with other white Democratic voters in disenfranchising African Americans and opposing abolitionist movements in the city.

John Mitchel, a well-known exiled Irish nationalist (whose son later attended Columbia), openly declared his support for Southern slavery in 1853, calling it a “good in itself.”[13]

Columbia’s move to midtown in 1857 further integrated the college geographically and economically with its Irish American neighbors. The new campus in between Forty-ninth and Fiftieth streets, and bounded by Madison Avenue and Park Avenue, was far more underdeveloped and impoverished than its previous Park Place campus. The *New-York daily tribune* commented that Columbia’s new site in the Nineteenth Ward, albeit an “extension in all its branches of usefulness,” was “so far out of town” that it embarrassed the already struggling college.[14] Neither was the midtown campus situated in a traditionally respectable part of the city. The glamorous Broadway divided the city roughly into the wealthy “dollar side” on the west and the “shilling side” on the east; the Madison campus was undoubtedly situated in the shilling side. In fact, the Nineteenth and Twenty-second Wards together held “the majority of the piggeries” in New York City at the time. The streets in the Fifties between Sixth and Seventh avenues, only a few blocks away from Columbia, were derogatively dubbed “Hogtown,” “Pigtown,” or “Stinktown.”[15] Even the Board admitted that the midtown location was at best a “temporary site,” before Columbia could secure a permanent parcel of land.[16]

In addition to piggens and farms, the Nineteenth Ward also housed a large number of Irish Americans. According to the 1855 New York state census, around 8,000 of the ward’s 17,866 people were immigrants.[17] An article in the *New York Times* compared the Irish population there to the piggeries, calling the neighborhood “shanties in which the pigs and the Patricks lie down together while little ones of Celtic and swinish origin lie miscellaneously, with billy-goats here and there interspersed.”[18] The Ward was also famous for being a Catholic religious hub. Columbia’s midtown campus bordered the Church of St. John the Evangelist, headed by Rev. James McMahan.[19] Father McMahan, a good friend of Archbishop John Hughes, subsequently oversaw the removal of the Church to farther east to make space for Hughes’ newly commissioned St. Patrick’s Cathedral, designed by James Renwick Jr. (AB 1836).[20] Ridiculed at the

time as “Hughes’ Folly,” construction of the Cathedral nonetheless began in 1858, two blocks away from Columbia, stimulating economic development in the area and pushing the Catholic Church’s real estate holdings in New York to a record \$1.6 million.[21] Correspondingly, Columbia’s relocation turned the institution into a large landowner in both downtown and midtown Manhattan and the “slumlord” of many Irish American tenants; Columbia’s trustees records included extensive regulation on the “erection of party walls” intended to separate different tenements.[22] Ironically, this historical moment might have marked the emergence of Columbia and the Catholic Church as the two foremost real estate owners in Manhattan.

Despite the economic ties and geographical proximity, New York continued to perceive Columbia as a beacon of Anglo-Protestant education in diametrical opposition to the Popery, and the institution often became a proxy for religious squabble in the city. One notable incident—the Gibbs affair—became a subject of ridicule by the Irish American press on the hypocrisy of Protestantism. In 1854, Columbia’s Board of Trustees refused to appoint Dr. Oliver Wolcott Gibbs to professorship on the grounds that he was a unitarian. The affairs soon became highly publicized, dividing parents and alumni of Columbia; the New York State Senate even investigated the college for possible violation of “the charter’s provisions against a religious test for its faculty.”[23] The Irish press saw the incident as another example of the Protestant tyranny and “religious bigotry.” An editorial in the *Nation*, an Irish nationalist press[24], called Columbia’s nearly-all-Protestants Board members “hoary old bigots” who denied “a most learned and scientific man” professorship just because he was not protestant. It went on to call founders of Columbia “Royal Fools” who never intended there to be religious inclusivity when “difference in religious tenets was made a test.”[25] Another prominent Irish American newspaper, *Freeman’s Journal*, observed that although “now and then accident or convenience has given a place in some of the minor Professorships to a Catholic or to an Infidel,” most positions at Columbia were given to Episcopalians. The article further used the scandal to attack Protestant hypocrisy, that despite their principle of “liberty of individual,” no religious liberty was offered by its leading institution,



Columbia.[26] In 1860, anti-Catholic newspapers reciprocated the attack, after Archbishop John Hughes claimed that the success of protestant colleges like Oxford and Cambridge should be accredited to their Catholic founders. In response to Hughes' speech, the *Times* asked: "[if] Trinity Church and Columbia College were to become... Mormons," could they claim, "See what we have done for religion and education, we Mormons?"[27]

This is not to say, however, that Columbia was just a neutral, innocent proxy in the religious strife. The college certainly saw itself as an Anglo-Protestant, if not Episcopalian, institution. During President King's inauguration in 1849, Prof. Charles Anthon explicitly stated in his oration that Columbia was founded on the model of "the o'd Anglo-Saxon, democratic education." [28] By 1854, nineteen of the Board's twenty-four members (79%) were Episcopalian.[29] Columbia also did not drop its mandatory chapel service, modeled after the "formularies of the Church of England," until 1890.[30] Although "all religious and political subjects are expressly" prohibited on campus, many Columbia graduates and affiliates privately expressed negative views of the Irish.[31] George T. Strong regularly referred to Irish Americans as "Paddy" or "Celts" in his diary. In one instance, he claimed that "England is right about the lower class of Irish. They are brutal, base, cruel, cowards, and as insolent as base." [32] Philip Hone, a Columbia trustee from 1824-51, feared an Irish takeover of the government and called the Irish "strangers among us" that shared no "patriotism or affection in common with American citizens." [33] Even in the 1880s, students continued to use the derogatory "Paddy" to describe Irish Americans. As late as 1892, the *Columbia Spectator* analogized a poorly organized event to "[degrading] one of the most glorious of Columbia customs from its stately pinnacle of dignity to the level of St. Patrick's day procession," again mocking the Irish American community.[34]

Irish Americans viewed these anti-Catholic rhetorics in the broader context of economic discrimination against their community. Protestant business owners in the 1850s frequently posted advertisements that called for workers of "any country or color except

Irish,” and Irish workers continued to accuse Blacks of lowering their wages and displacing them to the fringe of labor. Although Columbia officially hired no Black janitors (the Board only hired one Christopher Oscanyan—a name of Armenian origin—whom Strong dismissed as “so inefficient a janitor... who knows so little of his profession”), its faculty members like Dr. John Torrey readily employed African American servants.[35] As a war over the national question of slavery seemed increasingly likely, Irish Americans became growingly hostile towards both Anglo-Protestant elites and African Americans, whom they believed were conspiring together to replace their jobs. On election day, 1860, James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *Herald*, admonished Irish and German laborers: “If Lincoln is elected to-day, you will have to compete with the labor of four million emancipated negroes.”[36]

## Columbia and African Americans: “I Know Of But Three... Rabid and Frantic Nigger Worshipers”

The reality of the relationship between New York’s wealthy elites and Black Americans, however, was far more complicated and fragile than the “unholy” alliance Irish Americans imagined. Indeed, the “Anglo-Saxon” label proposed by Prof. Anthon implicitly suggested not only anti-Irish sentiment, but also racial exclusion. Unlike the Irish, few African Americans lived around Columbia’s midtown campus. According to the 1850 census, only 816 free Blacks lived in the Nineteenth Ward.[37] By 1860, the number had, in fact, dropped to a mere 563, even as the population of the ward drastically expanded from 18,465 to 28,252.[38]

The institution’s main engagement with local African American communities in this period came through the Colored Orphan Asylum, established in 1834 and largely run by wives and relatives of Columbia affiliates. Even then, the asylum claimed that it “had

nothing to do with the question of slavery” and was solely interested in reducing “pauperism and crime” and enhancing “public safety.” The asylum also only prepared the orphans for menial labor. Initially, the children were “bound out at the age of twelve as indentured servants on farms, the boys until the age of twenty-one and the girls to age eighteen.”[39] The vocational nature of the asylum cannot be clearer if one compares it to the Columbia Grammar School, established just a few years prior (1828) “under the patronage of the trustees.” Run directly by Prof. Anthon and designed to prepare white students for entering Columbia College, the grammar school taught not only “the regular branches of English,” but also “classics and mathematics... equal to the requirements of a student qualified to enter the freshman class of Columbia college.”[40] This dichotomy between the two institutions was perhaps best represented by the story of James Parker Barnett. Expelled from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (P&S) for having “mixed ancestry,” Barnett later became a physician at the asylum to serve the Black orphans. Clearly, the scope and objective of Columbia’s outreach efforts to Black communities was extremely narrow.[41]

The lack of contact with the African Americans was accompanied by a general nonchalance towards abolitionism. Like many Northern universities, Columbia did very little to address the question of slavery in the Antebellum period. In 1834, John Jay II, at the time a young abolitionist, had to debate the issue with not only students at Columbia, but also his acquaintances in other colleges. After Jay’s father sent “a few pamphlet (sic) on the subject of abolition” to one of Jay’s friends at Yale, he wrote Jay a long letter. “These, although containing views *opposite* to my [?], were by no means unacceptable,” his friend stated, “for I believe no person [?] to decide upon my [?], especially a national one like that of slavery, without he has previously made himself acquainted with the opinions of both parties.”[42]

Yet, twenty years later, even as the nation grappled with the sectional crisis and many Northern universities emerged at the forefront of abolitionism, Columbia remained a conservative bastion that not just rejected the abolitionist rhetorics, but outright

expressed pro-slavery conservatism. After the controversial Compromise of 1850, Columbia student Charles A. Sullman delivered an oration in the annual commencement, denouncing the “fanaticism” of abolitionism. According to the *New-York daily tribune*, the speech “took the conservative view of enthusiasm in Reform, and was particularly severe on the advocates of Anti-slavery.”[43] Many students also voiced their opposition to President King’s personal tie to the Republican party and abolitionist attitude. In 1856, an anonymous op-ed in the *New York Herald*, titled “Teaching the Young Idea How to Shoot,” accused King of politicized conduct after the caning of Sen. Charles Sumner. According to the student, President King made a speech at the Tabernacle, “censuring, as might be expected, the conduct of Brooks at Washington, but praising, in the highest degree, Greeley and Webb as the model editors of the age.” The student went on to bash the radicalism of Republican Horace Greeley, before questioning: “Does the President of Columbia College present these men as models for his pupils? Is the political arena a fit place for the head of a classical school to exhibit excitement to such an extent as to lead people to question the soundness of his reason?”[44]

The *Herald* op-ed led to a stream of student publications describing the political culture of Columbia. A day later, another student submitted a letter to the *Herald* under anonymity, clarifying that “by a wise provision..., all religious and political subjects are expressly forbid (Sic) to be mentioned within [Columbia’s] wall.” As a result of the rule, “during the present session [only] some two or three students delivered anti-slavery addresses,” and President King “formally forbade their repetition.” The student then listed the abolitionist “composition” of different student groups: “Delta Phi Fraternity, *unanimously conservative*; Psi Upsilon Fraternity, *about three-fourths conservative*; Delta Psi Fraternity, *about three-fourths conservative*... Philolexian Society, *with one exception, conservative*.” The only anomaly he named was the Peithologean Society, which was “almost entirely anti-slavery.”[45]

Yet, a student representative from the Peithologean Society soon refuted this claim in a separate letter, clarifying that his club “boasts of having many noble sons of the South among her alumni.” He added that “there are not, however, as far as my experience goes, ten men in the whole college who entertain such [abolitionist] view. In fact, I know of but three.” Another student, calling himself “an indignant Peithologean reader,” corroborated with the account by explaining the pro-slavery nature of the club: “On several occasions, when a debate arose on the subject of slavery, several who supported nigger worshipping principles were voted down by acclamation.” Finally, he explained that three Columbia students, whom he called “rabid and frantic nigger worshippers,” had summoned a meeting to condemn the *Herald* for publishing a letter that attacked President King, but “owing to the overwhelming preponderance of proslavery sentiments, the *Herald* fortunately escaped the unmitigated censure.”[46] If these four students’ anonymous allegations were true, the *Herald* letters revealed a shocking apathy towards abolitionism--if not outright pro-slavery conservatism--in a Northern college with few students from the South, *five* years before the onset of the Civil War. Indeed, as late as January, 1861, prominent Columbia affiliates like Hamilton Fish and William Dodge would still plead with Lincoln for further compromise with the South, claiming that his “heart is filled with sorrow at the dangers threatening [my country].”[47]

There was only one *Herald* letter during the Brooks-Sumner affairs that came to the defense of President King and condemned the violence on the Senate floor. Although the letter refrained from the political question and promised to “offer no extended vindication of our President,” the authors made clear that “if there be one among us who does not regard the attack of Preston S. Brooks upon Senator Sumner as brutal and cowardly, he would be outlawed from our midst by common consent.”[48] The letter was signed by four graduating seniors—Charles N. Clark, Charles C. Suydam, William T. Van Riper, and Edwin S. Babcock—three of whom would end up serving in the Union Army during the war.[49] It is unclear whether these four students were among the

abolitionist “minority” that previous letters alluded to, but their op-ed showed that Columbia at least had some moderate voices.

In the first two years of the Civil War, when it was ostensibly fought for the preservation of the union, not abolition, Columbia steered clear of race for the most part. A month after the surrender of Fort Sumter, Columbia held a flag-raising ceremony. Major Robert Anderson, the federal commander at the fort, spoke, before the crowd broke into singing the Star Spangled Banner. There was no mentioning of slavery or abolition throughout the event.[50] Not everyone, however, shared the patriotic enthusiasm. Dr. John Torrey observed that Richard Sears McCulloh, the Baltimore-born Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, “took no interest in the proceedings” at flag raising. As the war became increasingly radicalized, so was McCulloh in his sympathy to the Confederacy, portending his sinister role during the draft riots.[51]

Few Columbia students or graduates ended up enlisting during the war. The classes of 1861 through 1864 graduated 167 men; of these 16 served in the war (not accounting for the ones in the Seventh Regiment militia). Fewer than a dozen alumni were killed in the war.[52] Ironically, the Board had preemptively purchased a vacant lot in the Greenwood Cemetery “for the purpose of interring there any Alumni of the College who might perish in the war for the union,” but there “seem to have been no demands upon the lot for this purpose” and it was instead used for the burial of janitorial staff.[53]

## Gathering Storm: Urban Disorder and the “Gallant Seventh”

In June 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia secretly crossed the Potomac River into Union territory. Lee’s sudden incursion into Pennsylvania caught the North off guard, as New York’s political and business leaders scrambled to save the Union troops at Gettysburg. John Jay II received an urgent letter

regarding “the invasion of Pennsylvania by a formidable enemy threatening Philadelphia” from the local Military Committee. “Unless an enormous force shall be accumulated,” the letter warns, “our sister state *will* be overwhelmed by Lee’s army.”[54] Similarly pessimistic about the war, George Templeton Strong implored in his diary: “May God avert a great disaster! I fear [General] Joe Hooker, drunk or sober, is no match for Lee.”[55] Jay’s letter called for the “most energetic measures” and “[summoning] to arms all the able-bodied men of the state.”[56] By June 17th, most of New York City’s militia would be mustered out to reinforce the Union troops at Gettysburg. The regiments marched out of the city “amid tumultuous cheering, the fluttering of handkerchiefs, the ringing of bells, and the thousand bewildering noises of an enthusiastic crowd,” according to one militiaman.[57] However, the departure of nearly all militias left the city dangerously under-defended from both without and within.

Among the departing troops was the illustrious Seventh Regiment Militia (N.G.S.N.Y.). Led by Col. Marshall Lefferts, grand nephew of Leffert Lefferts Jr. (AB 1794), the regiment was known for the disproportionate number of New York’s merchant elites in its ranks. Many Columbia graduates, in fact, joined the regiment during the war; the muster rolls of the regiment indicated that as many as 71 Columbia affiliates were involved in the regiment during the war.[58] Henry M. Congdon, a graduate of Columbia College in 1854 and a private in the Seventh, wrote of their departure: “marching down Broadway is quite a [?], but yet arousing [?] enthusiasm! -- which we old men took very differently.”[59] Throughout the war, however, the regiment saw little combat in the war and its role was more or less ceremonial.

Since its very inception, the Seventh Regiment has functioned more as an urban riot police force than an actual militia. As early as the 1820s, the Seventh Regiment (then named Twenty-seventh Regiment) played a significant role in putting down riots and restoring order. In July 1834, a deadly riot broke out between working-class New Yorkers and abolitionist societies. John Jay II, the abolitionist leader of Columbia, found himself caught in the middle of the conflicts—just as he would 30 years later. In a letter,

her mother Augustus told Jay she was “very sorry to hear of the disturbance in the city,” but advised him to “be quiet on the subject [of abolition]—although you may agree with abolitionism in principle, I would when necessary [?] opinion modestly... they appear to... excite [the] angry feeling of the opposite party.”[60] Philip Hone, a trustee at the time, also wrote of the “dreadful riots between the Irish and the Americans” in his diary, noting the law enforcement’s failure to deter the rioters: “The Mayor arrived with a strong body of watchmen, but they were attacked and overcome, and many of the watchmen are severely wounded.” Ultimately, it was the Seventh Regiment that came to the rescue: “The Mayor has ordered out Colonel Sanford’s regiment and a troop of horse, and proper measures have been taken to preserve order, but we apprehend a dreadful night.”[61]

The relationship between Columbia affiliates and the Seventh regiment in this period requires further investigation, but it is clear that by the 1850s, the two institutions were deeply associated. Between 1849 and 1852, Col. Abram Duryee, who attended Columbia’s grammar school[62], became the commander of the Seventh Regiment and led the regiment in suppressing the Astor Place Riots, which saw the city’s working-class rise up against the wealthy “codfish aristocracy” at the Astor Opera House, an emblem of the bourgeois elites. In 1874, Duryee was appointed by Mayor William F. Havemeyer (later an important donor to Columbia) as the Police Commissioner of New York City, earning notoriety for cracking down on the Tompkin Square labor protests.[63] In addition, when the new Engineer Corps (Company K) was formed in 1855, six Columbia affiliates joined in the next five years. In fact, a Columbia alumnus, Capt. George Clinton Farrar (AB 1848), became the commanding officer of that company.[64] Finally, another noted incident was the tragic death of Laurens Hamilton (ex AB 1854), a private in the F Company and grandson of Alexander Hamilton. In a 1858 regimental trip to Richmond, Hamilton “accidentally fell overboard and was drowned” in the James River.[65]



One may identify several patterns in Columbia affiliates' ties to the Seventh Regiment. Firstly, most Columbia affiliates served as privates in the regiment and few actually climbed to high ranks. Secondly, some affiliates presumably joined and served in the regiment with their siblings and relatives, including the Bacons, Hyatts, Lacombs, Hamiltons, and Pells. Finally, for no clear reason, most Columbia affiliates were concentrated in the Sixth (F) and Tenth (K) Companies, a pattern perhaps determined by the students' social network or affiliation to secret societies. The Sixth Company, for instance, saw the enlistment of at least five direct relatives of trustees during the war: Charles C. Haight, James F. Ruggles, Henry M. Congdon, Horatio Potter Jr., and Rufus King, Jr. In fact, Ruggles, a real estate investor at the time, possibly saw the regiment as a potential business opportunity. Having served with John W. Timpson (AB 1856, AM 1859) in the Sixth Company, Ruggles later became involved in a business deal with the Timpsons regarding the Westchester Peat Manufacturing Company.[66]

As a result, the Seventh Regiment—arguably as an extension of Columbia—repeatedly found itself not only protecting the wealthy elites' interest, but also brokering peace between two groups the college had historically disliked: Irish Americans and African Americans. Overall, members of the regiment showed little interest in abolitionism or protecting African American civil rights. In their 1858 Richmond trip, the regiment was reportedly “disappointed in the character and manners” of the enslaved Black Americans who welcomed them.[67] Ruggles himself was a close friend of Gov. Washington Hunt, a conservative Whig politician who repeatedly refused to join the Republican party or vote for Lincoln. According to Strong's observation in 1860, James Ruggles shared a “vigorous... political reaction against sectionalism, John Brownism, Higher Lawrism, and the like.”[68]

When war first broke out in 1861, the Seventh Regiment was called into service for 30 days by President Lincoln. On April 19, 1861, it left New York to a cheering crowd. They marched out “in full fatigue dress, with their knapsacks and blankets,” and locals in New York and Jersey City gathered to watch their formation, including Maj. Anderson, who

would later attend Columbia's flag raising ceremony. One observer wrote: "We saw women -- we saw men shed tears as they passed. Amidst the deafening cheers that rose, we heard cries of 'God bless them!'"[69] Despite the dramatism of the Gallant Seventh's departure, its actual service was less than underwhelming. Throughout the month of May, the regiment stayed in the vicinity of Washington D.C. and saw no actual fighting. Members of the Seventh initially received "meals at the Hotels" and slept in the House of Representatives "chamber floors," a luxury Henry Congdon called "living on prices." Ruggles, in fact, wrote his letter to Strong on the Senate desk of "a seceded Georgian Senator." They participated extensively in drills and parades, where their polished arms and neat uniform dazzled other volunteer troops, "many without arms, and few completely uniformed and equipped." [70] Photographs were also taken of the regiment. Among them, a young Private James Weeks (AB 1856) and an older Sergeant James Francis Ruggles (AB 1847) posed for pictures in their uniforms.

Henry M. Congdon did not particularly enjoy the outing. Having complained about "[sleeping] in nothing softer than a pine plank," eating poorly cooked food like "boiled chicken," and "marching in heavy knapsacks," Congdon admitted to his father in a letter from Camp Cameron: "You know I never had much military ardor." Though he did not acknowledge the presence of other Columbia affiliates, Congdon described to his father the familiar faces he saw: "Mr. Alex Annan & Mr. Corpher (both in law of Mr. Bill, I think)- are in my company—from acquaintances of reading [?], [to] the way that we are drilled it in to managed that 4 men are comrades always together." When marching down through "deserted land" of Maryland near Annapolis, Congdon noticed a group of enslaved people. Although Congdon sympathized with their "hardship," he was frustrated that "they did not know the Yankee character, nor the work that the regiment of 'gentlemen' was called to." [71]

In 1862, the Seventh Regiment was mustered into service again, this time for three months. As many as 58 Columbia affiliates, constituting a sizable portion (8%) of the 600 men-strong regiment, were called to arms. Again, the regiment was stationed near

Baltimore and put on Garrison duty at Fort Federal Hill instead of actual fighting. It was a job well suited for the regiment: vigilance over the population of Baltimore and rapid reaction to any disturbance. On the Fourth of July, the regiment was specifically ordered to be “ready at a moment’s notice to hasten to any part of the city,” though no riots ended up breaking out.[72]

Service in the Seventh Regiment did radicalize some of its members into actually enlisting in the Union Army. According to Colonel Emmonns Clark, many in the Seventh had hoped that it would be “sent forward to Washington, or to the Peninsula, or to Harper’s Ferry, or to any place where could see more active service and win military glory.”[73] At least 11 Columbia affiliates in the regiment eventually joined other units for heavier fighting. Among them was Edwin S. Babcock, the graduating senior who defended President King in the Brooks-Sumner affairs, and John Gouverneur Hone, an enrolled Columbia student (and great-grand nephew of Philip Hone) who defied “an order by President King not to leave” and chose service over completion of his degree.[74] However, for the most part, the regiment was simply another way for New York elites to avoid extensive military service. Even in his glorified account of the Seventh Regiment’s history, Col. Clark admitted: “Men with families, the higher walks of life, could not support them upon the paltry pittance allowed the common soldier; men of extensive business and large means could not afford enlist ‘for three years or the war.’”[75] Despite his service in the Seventh, James F. Ruggles continued to invest in mines and coal-processing plants during the course of the war. In fact, many Columbia affiliates were able to complete their degree *while* serving in the militia, showing just how limited the commitment was.

Thus, when Gov. Seymour fielded the regiment in response to Lee’s incursion in 1863, he made clear in the order that its service would last “no more than thirty days.” But Seymour had practical considerations as well: the departure of troops from the city rendered it dangerously under defended. In a letter to Seymour, Major Gen. John Wool warned: “We are at this moment without any reserve, or, indeed without any force

whatever to check an advance on the city.” Even more worrying was New York’s defense from within. Rumors suggested that the “copperhead” Democrats sympathetic to the South were colluding with Gen. Lee and preparing to launch a full-scale insurrection in the city on the Fourth of July. John Jay, for example, heard from a Democrat that “a secret organization” with “5,000 names... pledged to the movement almost from the beginning” had been lurking in the city.[76]

Back in Gettysburg, however, the tide of battle soon turned against General Lee and his army. Unable to break through General Meade’s defensive position on the ridge, Lee ordered a desperate charge uphill against overwhelming Union forces. A military disaster, Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia was forced into a slow retreat back across Maryland. The much dreaded insurrection in New York seemed to be averted, and the city was dominated by patriotism on the Fourth of July. George T. Strong could not hide his excitement in his diary, calling Gettysburg a “priceless victory” and concluding that the “Government is strengthened four-fold at home and abroad.”[77] Similarly, John Jay concluded that the secret organization’s original machination must have been foiled by the Union victory at Gettysburg. Clement Clark Moore, a perennial Columbia weather diarist, declared: “More like summer!”[78]

## “The Northern Sky was Brilliantly Illuminated by Fire”: The New York Draft Riots Began

Tension, however, was brewing underneath the ostensible jubilation. The now three-year long conflict had taken an economic toll on the city. At least one tenant, the Bloodgood family, requested rent reduction from Columbia.[79] Even the wealthy Columbia affiliates began to take the brunt of the war. In June 1863, Francis Lieber, a Professor at the Law School who worked extensively with the Federal government

during the war and author of the “Lieber codes,” wrote to Hamilton Fish about the rising cost of living in the city. Lieber complained that “taxes, prices are very high, and having them clipped as it were on both ends, is very [?] to men of hundred incomes.”[80] Despite the economic hardship, Columbia as an institution continued to spend lavishly. In June 1863, the Board of Trustees voted to allocate \$960 for renovations at the President’s House.[81] The overspending was so pervasive that Gouverneur M. Ogden, Treasurer of the Board, wrote a letter to Hamilton Fish calling “the facility to the President’s expenditures” to his attention. “Between ourselves,” Ogden wrote, “I am persuaded the Board was deceived in reference both to the expense of the catalogue & to the \$200 appropriation for Joy, and this through Prof. Joy’s influence over the President.”[82]

Instead of retrenchment, Columbia chose to press harder on its working-class tenants to cover the rising expenses. During the Civil War, the college collected over \$42,000 from rents every year, which accounted for two-thirds of the school’s annual operational expenses. After a 1861 report indicated that \$3275 of the \$47426.83 rent collected were in arrears and the collection of an additional \$6520 were deemed “very doubtful,” Columbia began cracking down on its tenants.[83] In 1862, the Board resolved that it had the power to pursue every legal option “for the recovery of such rent [in arrears], or to obtain possession of the leasehold premises.” In 1863, the Board voted to extend this power to taxes of the rents as well. Undoubtedly, this decision further solidified Columbia’s reputation as an aristocratic and exploitative institution.[84]

Another source of tension was the newly imposed Federal draft. A friend of Jay noted, in a letter, the toll of war on his family: “my brother died in Louisiana last fall... and left a family of a wife and four children, the oldest 11 years and the youngest 1 year.”[85] The letter specifically called for revoking the draft and returning to a volunteer system, albeit with increased incentives to enlist. Indeed, the Federal draft had further divided the city. While the War Department began a door-to-door conscription of draft-eligible men in May and June, wealthy Americans could simply pay \$300 (a year of salary for a working

man) for a substitute or joined the Seventh Regiment to evade service. To working-class New Yorkers, the draft further stratified the war, and the Seventh Regiment became not only a symbol of class suppression, but also class privilege, enabling New York's wealthy elites to avoid fighting. The Nineteenth Ward, where Columbia College was located, saw just under 4,500 people subject to the "first class" draft in 1863. By March 3, around 570 of them were declared "deserters" for failing to show up at the draft office.[86] Similarly, the Nineteenth Ward police, composed of only fifty-five officers, logged a steady increase of arrests from January to May. Though none of the arrests—for "drunkenly conduct," "suspicion of robbery," and theft—was directly related to the draft, the undermanned police force foreshadowed its inadequate response during the riots.[87]

On July 13, the second drawing of draft numbers, the socioeconomic tension that had been accumulating in New York finally erupted. Just as William G. King wandered around campus and Dr. Torrey travelled downtown in the morning, a group of Irish workers, fearful of being drafted and angry at the socioeconomic injustice, gathered in an "empty lot" near Central Park and began marching down Fifth Avenue. After burning down the draft office, the mob entered the college grounds in the afternoon, threatening to burn down the building. At this critical moment, two Catholic priests arrived. One of them was identified as Rev. James McMahan, the pastor at the nearby Church of St. John the Evangelist. Instead of condemning the Irish mob's violence, Father McMahan appealed to their Catholic faith, reminding them that "a church was attached to the building, which he was sure they would not molest." [88] He then promised that President King was "kind to the local poor," before reiterating that the mob would "disgrace themselves by burning a building dedicated to the worship of God." [89] McMahan's quick thinking saved the campus from impending doom. The crowd "barely desisted when addressed by the Catholic priest" and soon dispersed, sparing some "fine mansions" near Columbia too.

At the Assay office downtown, Torrey finally came to realize the gravity of the issue after hearing “fresh accounts [coming] in every half hour” and quickly rushed home.

Attempting to avoid the car hijackers, Torrey walked quietly on foot and saw “the whole road way & sidewalks filled with rough fellows (& some equally fought women) who were tearing up rails, cutting down telegraph plus, & setting fire to buildings.” Although McMahon’s intervention had dispersed the mob on campus, Torrey feared that the rioters would return. Having packed “some of the most valuable articles of small bulk,” the whole night Torrey and his family slept with their clothes on and were “ready for removal at a moment’s warning.” As he looked up to the sky, he found that the “northern sky was brilliantly illuminated [by blaze].”[90]

On the same day, Columbia affiliates across the city found themselves engulfed by chaos. George Templeton Strong’s dinner at Maison Doree (near Union Square) was interrupted by the “alarm of a coming mob,” consisting of “thirty-four lousy, blackguardly Irishmen with a trail of small boys..., but there were no policemen in sight.” Strong did not hide the anti-Irish prejudice in his writing: “The rabble was perfectly homogeneous. Every brute in the drove was pure Celtic–hod-carrier or loafer.” After Dinner, Templeton walked to “St. Nicholas Hotel to see the mayor and General Wool.” Other Columbia affiliates like John Jay II were present as well. Templeton attempted to pressure the mayor into declaring martial law and adopting tougher measures to put down the riots. However, Mayor Opdyke, attempting to please the working-class electorate and salvage his political career, refused to escalate the conflict and dismissed Templeton’s idea as “causing the civil war at once.” Templeton left the meeting “disgusted,” believing that “neither Opdyke nor General Wool is nearly equal to this crisis.” Strong had to place his hope of ending the riots in the changing weather, as it began “raining briskly” towards midnight. Yet, his diary entry ended in an ominous tone: “God knows what tonight or tomorrow may bring forth.”[91]

The disturbance spread as far as Westchester, where John Jay resided. In a July 18th letter, Jay wrote: “In the usually quiet neighborhood where I live, in Westchester County,

some forty miles from town, threats of murder and arson are openly made.”[92] Even then, Jay was presumably safer in suburban Westchester than New York. One of Jay’s friends, Renwick, explained in a letter his encounter with a “low fellow” by the name of Sherwood who deeply resented Jay and called him an “aristocrat.” Sherwood threatened that “five hundred good ‘law abiding citizens’ ought to give [Jay] a coat of tar” and, perhaps unaware of Jay’s itinerary, taunted that he would personally give Jay “fifty dollars to show [himself] in New York.” Although Renwick concluded that Sherwood was not bothered enough to “send a mob” to attack Jay, he feared that these “agitated party” and “ignorant fellow” would damage his home.[93]

John Jay drew strong political inferences from the draft riots. In a July 18th letter, John Jay observed that “apart from the Irish the *copperhead* element in the rural districts is ready to co-operate with them.” Jay had long suspected that the copperhead Democrats were behind the event and speculated that the rioters were now trying to instigate an “armed conflict between the National Government and the State Government” after Gettysburg “interefered with the original plan.”[94] His correspondence with Renwick, who warned Jay of the disloyal Democratic “copperhead” who “cursed everything loyal, denounced the draft, said it would never take place in this state,” only confirmed his suspicion.

Yet, to Sherwood and many other working-class Irish in New York, Jay and his “aristocratic” posse manipulated the public into an ill-judged moral crusade against slavery and a prolonged conflict; the newly imposed draft was just another example of socioeconomic discrimination. In addition, many of them resented the growingly abolitionist nature of the war, fearing that the emancipated slaves would replace their jobs.

Driven by the belief that the Civil War was fought for the benefits of African Americans, the rioters specifically targeted Black businesses, residences, and schools in New York. Among them was the Colored Orphan Asylum. Dr. Torrey, having earlier rushed home



to “protect my colored servants,” noted the incident in his diary: “Towards evening the mob, furious as demons, went yelling over to the Colored-Orphan Asylum in 5th Avenue a little below where we live — & rolling a barrel of kerosine in it, the whole structure was soon in blaze, & is now a smoking ruin. What has become of the 300 poor innocent orphans I could not learn.”[95] Throughout the week, Torrey would report in his diary many more tragic deaths of African Americans, including the sighting of “a poor negro hung an hour or two before” on Wednesday.

In the absence of law enforcement, firefighters played a critical role in stemming the violence during the riots. At the asylum, members of the Engine Company No. 18 fought valiantly to fend off the mob, creating enough time for evacuation, while the nearby Liberty Hook & Ladder Company No. 16 and Relief Hose Company No. 51 “formed themselves into a volunteer Patrol for the protection of the College Buildings and other property in the neighborhood from violence.”[96] New York's merchant elites also took the matters of public safety into their own hands. William E. Dodge Sr., vice president of the Chamber of Commerce and a Columbia graduate, tried to rally wealthy merchants and financiers to work together against the mob. They banded together to form civilian patrols and resolved to “recommend to the proper authorities the consideration and propriety of declaring martial law in this city.”[97]

Any hope that the rain would end the disturbance was dashed the next morning, when rioters re-emerged on the streets. Dr. John Torrey, in his diary, remarked: “we shall still have to finish the business with saltpetre.” As the conflict re-escalated on Tuesday, Torrey was warned that “all the College buildings were to be destroyed at night.” Just like the previous day, Torrey's family hurriedly packed “most valuable articles” in a small traveling bag and hid their “basket of silver” in his friend's house. Their hasty departure was only put on pause after a “confidential message from a Catholic priest” arrived, informing them that “Gov. Seymour had taken the responsibility of stopping (Sic) the draft.”[98] Ultimately, it was unclear whether the threat to Columbia campus was

credible or not, as George T. Strong observed that “plenty of rumors [circulated] throughout the day and evening, but nothing very precise or authentic.”[99]

Shockingly, Prof. Richard S. McCulloh, the Baltimore-born Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, most likely joined the rioters on Tuesday. In a letter to Hamilton Fish, Dr. Torrey reported: “On Tuesday of the Riot-week, he was in the college grounds. -g told me he had spent the afternoon in the mob. His conversation was such as to convince me that he took sides with the rioters.”[100] Three months after the draft riots, McCulloh would resign and secretly defect to the Confederacy, where he experimented with chemical weapons for the Confederate war effort. He wrote a letter to the Board from Richmond, thanking the school for “all the generosity & consideration you have for nine years extended to me,” but also claiming that “it should excite no surprise that one, born and reared a Southerner, prefers to cast his lot with that of the South.”[101]

Francis Lieber, Columbia’s leading abolitionist and union supporter, would have none of that. In a letter to Hamilton Fish, Lieber asked: “He says in his letter to the Trustees, he ‘was born and educated in the South’--born in Baltimore! What does South mean? Simply and exclusively a piece of land where slavery is admitted--nothing else.”[102] In the end, the Board of Trustees, under Fish’s leadership, resolved to expel McCulloh for having “allied himself to those now in rebellion” and ordered that his name “be stricken from the list of Professors of this College,” with most trustees voting in “hearty approval.”[103]

## Law and Order Triumph: the Seventh Regiment returned

With the riots no end in sight, Mayor Opdyke and Governor Seymour were forced to request military assistance to put down the riots. On Tuesday, the Seventh Regiment

militia, now stationed near Frederick, Maryland in pursuit of Lee's retreating army, heard "rumors of a terrible riot in New York." By 4 p.m., Colonel Lefferts received the order to return home and put down the riots. Despite the chaos, the second day ended with a glimmer of hope.[104] "Reinforcements will doubtless arrive, & we shall have law & order," Dr. Torrey wrote resolutely in his diary.

When Dr. John Torrey returned to work on Wednesday, July 15, he found his office virtually barricaded. His coworkers prepared "a battery of about 25 rifle barrels, carrying 3 balls each, & mounted on a gun-carriage. It could be loaded & fired with rapidity." The improvising chemists even made "quantities of [sulfur dioxide], with arrangements for projects it on the mob," as they prepared for the possible next wave of attack.[105]

At 4:30 a.m. the following morning, the Seventh Regiment militia finally arrived in New York. John T. Headley wrote, "the steady ranks were seen marching along Canal Street towards Broadway, and soon drew upon [the] front of the St. Nicholas Hotel" just before dawn. Among them was Henry M. Congdon. Throughout the day, Congdon and his unit would be clearing rioters' strongholds on the East Side of the city between Fourteenth and Thirty-fifth streets. Writing from Thirty-third street near Third Avenue, Congdon reported on the resistance they faced: "One of the most determined rioters who deliberately loaded and fired from behind a woman, was finally brought down by two of our men who are stationed on top of a house and has since died." The operation was largely successful. According to Strong, by 7pm, the previous force at Gramercy Park was fully relieved "by a company of regulars and a party of the Seventh with a couple of howitzers, and there has been but a stray shot or two since dark"--a rare moment of silence that the city has not enjoyed for days.[106] "About 10 p.m.," Congdon wrote, "we formed a strong force and with a howitzer in front patrolled the neighborhood and met with no resistance." [107] His unit was finally able to enjoy a brief reprieve, as the "luxury of Ming china was fully appreciated, while the beef, [?] rolls, & coffee made for a feast." After a "comfortable night on duty" with only "two casualties to report" from the previous day, Congdon reassured his family that "there is no further danger" and the regiment

was “ready to whip on weight in wild cats if necessary.” As the “Army of Gramercy Park” was further “broken up into detachments for duties in different parts of the town” and put down the remaining pockets of resistance in the next few days, the 1863 draft riots finally came to an end.

Reexamining the fragments of evidence from the riots, it is clear that the attack on college grounds was socioeconomically, not racially, motivated. Although Dr. Torrey’s Black servants might have been assaulted by the mob if Rev. McMahon did not intervene, they were not the original targets of the mob. After all, Columbia had earlier built its reputation of pro-slavery conservatism—even housing a professor that joined the mob. Instead, it was President King’s personal wealth and the college’s property that allured the mob. Evidence also suggests that it was a spontaneous rather than coordinated attack. The rioters who gathered on campus did not know whether Columbia was a pro-Republican institution, and they were even unsure “what the college building was used for.”

Just as the rioters acted spontaneously as they saw fit, so did Columbia and its affiliates. Columbia’s role in the draft riots remains complex, if not contradictory at times. While some faculty members like John Torrey protected and sympathized with African Americans, others, like George Templeton Strong, who continued to call Blacks “niggers” in his diary, glossed over the racialized aspects of the riots. One—Richard S. McCulloh—even joined the mob and championed racial violence. Similarly, although Columbia affiliates in the Seventh Regiment like Congdon played a critical role in reinstating order and protecting African Americans from further violence, they, like the rest of the college, had repeatedly expressed their antipathy to Black interests. At the same time, despite Columbia’s antagonism towards Irish Americans, either through nativist rhetoric or the Seventh Regiment militia, it was an Irish Catholic priest that saved the College’s property. In short, Columbia appeared to share both complicity and victimhood in the 1863 draft riots. As Sven Beckert argues in *The Monied Metropolis*, the emerging bourgeois elites of New York were often internally divided and

ideologically malleable, preferring political expediency to structural reform. What the end of the draft riots signaled was much less of a reconstruction, but a restoration of the status quo.

## A Half-hearted Reconstruction: the Draft Riots' impacts on Columbia's Perception of Public Safety, Labor Movements, and Race

Despite Columbia affiliates' extensive connection to the draft riots, the Board of Trustees remained relatively quiet in its aftermath. In their first meeting after the draft riots, the trustees adopted a resolution to recognize the "efficient and successful efforts" of Liberty Hook & Ladder Company No. 16 and Relief Hose Company No. 51 "in protecting the College property from imminent danger." Several copies of the resolution were printed and framed so that they could be "placed in their respective fire halls." The Board specifically praised their "generous sense of duty" and "manly vindication alike of *public order* and of *laws*, and of the private rights and personal immunities of the citizen." Although the trustees condemned the riots as "alarming," "incendiary," and "embarrassing," they did nothing beyond that to address the issue.[108]

Yet, the draft riots seemed to mark the beginning of Columbia's reevaluation of public safety after its relations with the Irish American community unraveled. In 1864, the Board approved the request of Prof. Torrey and Prof. Joy to "fence in" their campus residences.[109] The reevaluation gained momentum under the new administration of President Frederick A. P. Barnard, who took office in 1864. In virtually all of his annual report, President Barnard stressed the urgency of relocation and expansion. "But the great and decisive objection [to the current campus] presents itself," President Barnard reported in 1866, "in the light of the obvious mission and *manifest destiny* of the

college.” Columbia’s attempted exodus from midtown also coincided with New York’s renewed emphasis on class tension and policing, as armories were built across the Manhattan island over the next three decades to defend the city from within. In the words of Barnard, Columbia must focus on building its “respectability and consideration” within the city. Even Barnard’s proposed design of the buildings—an “imposing exterior” that “powerfully impresses the popular mind”—articulated this vision.[110]

Although Columbia’s move to Morningside Heights never took place during Barnard’s administration, President Seth Low inherited his vision. Under his urging, a Committee on Site was swiftly created, and in its report, Morningside Heights was found appealing because “its situation on the top of a high ridge makes it conspicuous to the eye and gives a promise of quietness,” again reflecting an interest in building the school’s respectability. Low personally praised the relocation, stating that “by general consent the new site is unsurpassed in location by that of any university of the world.” The Committee also negotiated with the legislature to ensure that the campus was “free from the fear of intersecting streets” and the “threatened disaster” of outside traffic, further attempting to dissociate itself from the outside.[111]

Yet, as much as Columbia preferred to withdraw itself from its neighbors, it was not financially feasible. Although President Barnard endorsed a grandiose vision of institution of higher learning, that it was Columbia’s “inevitable destiny” to lead the “improvement of the human race,” in reality, Columbia’s day-to-day operation continued to be chronically dependent on its real estate holdings and “rentals fixed in the distant past.” In his inaugural address, Seth Low admitted that “substantially all the growth [of the college] has been made since 1867, [was] through the falling in of leases that matured about that time.”[112] Even Barnard seemed to acknowledge this paradox in his 1868 and 1870 reports. The new site Columbia must secure with “the least possible delay,” according to him, should “be eligibly situated” away from the population centers “in reference to the *future population* of the island,” while simultaneously be within the city limits and “adequate to the great coming wants.”[113]

At the same time, Columbia maintained a cordial tie with the Seventh Regiment militia. Columbia affiliates continued to join the regiment, and the intercollegiate sports games the militia hosted further strengthened this connection. In 1905, the *Seventh Regiment Gazette* reported a shooting match between Columbia students and a team of five from Company K, “composed entirely of old Columbia men.”[114] At this point, with the rise of professionalized police under the influence of Tammany Hall, the “Gallant Seventh” adopted a new role ushered in by the draft riots: strike breaking. In 1874, Abram Duryee, the Columbia-affiliated Colonel of the Seventh and now the Police Commissioner of New York City, turned his attention to labor movements in response to international movements like the Paris Commune. So ferocious was Duryee’s suppression of the Tompkin Square labor protests that local newspapers accused him of “[charging] his police upon inoffensive workingmen like so many ‘bulldogs.’”[115] Some Columbia affiliates in the Seventh Regiment, like Henry Major (LLB 1866), were also later involved in the suppression of the 1877 railroad strike.[116]

Columbia’s antipathy to the disruptive labor movements did not soften even under the administration of the relatively pro-union President Seth Low. In a speech delivered in Gettysburg, Low, ironically accompanied by the Seventh Regiment militia, declared that he recognized the union’s collective bargaining power and asked it to also “accept the responsibility that ought to go with power” and protect the interest of the society.[117] However, during Low’s administration, *Columbia Spectator* reported that “a large number of Columbia men have been actively employed in quelling the strikers of Brooklyn” in 1895. Praising the undergraduate students for “upholding the honor of this nation and preserving order and peace in our city,” the *Spectator* believed that “college authorities will afford them every opportunity to pass their examinations.” Among the student-militiamen, William B. Potts (ex 95 AB), was “injured by a stone thrown by one of the Brooklyn strikers” when serving in Company K of the Seventh Regiment, and Medwin Leale (MD 1896) had to be absent for an entire week of class.[118] Overall, the draft riots seemed to play an important, if not decisive, role in Columbia’s relocation and reevaluation of public safety.

In addition to labor and policing, the draft riots, for the first time, prompted the question of Black reparation and reconstruction in the city. In the absence of government action, private charities became crucial in facilitating this process. Columbia, as an institution, did very little to assist African Americans or any of its neighbors harmed by the riots. The Board did award Dr. Torrey \$75 for expenses incurred by him in protecting the College buildings in the riots. Similarly, although the firefighters “[declined] to receive any compensation therefore (Sic),” the school still paid them \$50 as compensation for the service.[119]

However, William E. Dodge, Sr., leader of the merchant community, stepped up and organized the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People to help African Americans who suffered from the riots. The committee raised \$40,779 over the course of the month: \$27,795 of which were distributed directly to over three thousand persons, while rest was spent on aid to orphans and widows as well as litigations over property damages. Columbia affiliates contributed generously to the fund, including Henry W. Smith, Morgan Dix, Gen. John G. Barnard, Hamilton Fish, John Jay, Rev. Stephen H. Tyng, Jr, among others. The relief committee also worked closely with African American community leaders like Rev. Charles B. Ray in distributing the money. Although the committee ultimately claimed that it gave out relief not “because they are colored people, but because they are, as a class, persecuted and in distress at the present moment,” one may see this effort as, perhaps, an early moment of reparative initiatives.[120]

Yet, it would be equally correct to conclude that the original goal of the committee, which was to “[restore] the confidence of the colored people in the community,” had largely failed. Despite the relief effort, Black population in the city continued to decline in the next decade.[121] Indeed, the relief for African Americans, albeit a large sum of money, paled in comparison to the \$1.5 million the city government allocated to the Substitute and Relief Committee to appease the rioters. Controlled by William M. “Boss” Tweed and his lackeys, the Committee hired substitutes for working-class New Yorkers



who could not afford being drafted, in exchange for political loyalty to Tammany Hall and him. Neither was rigorous prosecution of the rioters pursued; in fact, rioters who received the harshest sentences were charged with theft, not murder. During the riots, Dr. Torrey feared that, when Gov. Seymour agreed to the rioters' demand, that "the mob had, at least temporarily, triumphed"; in the aftermath of the riots, his worry proved to be true.[122]

While Columbia affiliates privately contributed to the relief effort, their action when serving in the public capacity was less than sympathetic to African Americans. The Board of Trustees, dominated by the same group of patrons Dodge's relief committee, sent only one letter to Congress during the war, which asked for the adoption of an international "weight standard" in 1864, rather than addressing the widely debated Thirteenth Amendment. Crucially, the letter stated that benefits of the new standard would be immense, even though it might initially confuse "those of *our own* Anglo-Saxon race." [123] This language clearly suggests a white-supremacist view of Columbia as an institution, if not the nation as a whole. In addition, Prof. McCulloh's defection to Confederacy seemed to have made a limited impression on Columbia. Less than a year after expelling McCulloh, the Board made the hasty decision in 1864 to appoint Frederick A. P. Barnard to Columbia's presidency after merely *one* meeting, even when local newspapers were reporting that Barnard used to be "a bosom friend of President Jefferson Davis." [124] In his administration, Barnard would lead Columbia away from the radicalism of President King. In fact, among all post-Civil War administrations, President Barnard used the word "Anglo-Saxon" in his annual report most frequently.

Again, this trend would only subside during Seth Low's presidency. Low, as a politician, was committed to memorialization of the Civil War. In another speech at Gettysburg, Low, then the mayor of Brooklyn, affirmed that "without slavery the national life never would have been in danger. Without the abolition of slavery the preservation of the Union was a dream." [125] Despite his condescending tone towards African Americans, who he deemed uneducated, untrained, and inexperienced, Low recognized that "the

ballot is the weapon of man” and freedmen could not secure their legal rights without it. “While the war abolished slavery,” Seth Low wrote in the *America* magazine, “it did not, because it could not, put an end to all the troubles to which the country is exposed because of slavery.”[126]

## From 1863 to 1968: Student Movements and the Politics of Disturbance

As Eric Foner concluded in his report, it would take “an unprecedented crisis on the campus itself” for Columbia to move beyond its history of racism and enslavement. Instinctively, many would compare the draft riots of 1863 to the Columbia University protests of 1968.[127] Indeed, how does one reconcile this image of the riot-suppressing, union-busting, and strike-breaking Columbia with the one a century later, that protested and rioted against the War in Vietnam and racial segregation?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this century-long century transformation, but, arguably, the draft riots left Columbia with a mixed legacy of “politics of disturbance” that led up to the 1968 protests. One notable example was the tradition of “Sophomore triumph.” According to *Columbia Spectator*, the class of 1866 began the tradition at the close of their sophomore year (July 1864), to celebrate the completion of Ancient Geography, a much dreaded class in the Sophomore Curriculum. The celebration consisted of “a funeral procession up Fifth avenue to the college green, where an oration and eulogy were delivered, followed by adjournment to a neighboring beer saloon.” It is unclear if the tradition was directly inspired by the draft riots, which took place just before the Class of 1866’s sophomore year, but its procedure was strongly reminiscent of the riots.[128]

Though Sophomore triumph had no progressive political agenda, its existence was inherently a contestation, if not a direct challenge, on the power and authority of the school. At the procession, music by a student organized band was played; a bonfire was lit; and effigies of unpopular professors (including, allegedly, an effigy of President Barnard in 1882) were burned. In 1892, The school attempted to shut down the parade, on the ground that it was “extremely undignified and disturbed the quiet of the community,” to no avail.[129] The politics of disorder at Columbia, inspired by the draft riots and carried on by traditions like the Sophomore triumph, ushered in the 1968 Crisis and, arguably, continues to live on today through student movements.

## Endnotes

[1] Eric Foner, "Columbia and the Civil War," Columbia University and Slavery, January 2017, [https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/content/12-columbia-and-civil-war#/\\_edn4](https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/content/12-columbia-and-civil-war#/_edn4).

*Catalogue of Columbia College, 1863-1864* (New York, 1864), 5, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn8y8u>.

[2] A. Hunter Dupree, and Leslie H. Fishel. "An Eyewitness Account of the New York Draft Riots, July, 1863." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (1960): 474. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888878>.

[3] The committee itself was formed by many Columbia affiliates like Samuel B. Ruggles, George T. Strong, George Allen, William E. Dodge, Sr., etc.

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