

Placing the *Negro* Mecca Under the Social Microscope:
Academic and Journalistic Imaginings of Black Harlemites,
1920-1950

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On November 30th, 1926 Columbia University faculty member John J. Coss, noted for his contributions to Columbia's contemporary civilization course, sent a letter with an accompanying memo and map to university president Nicholas Murray Butler.¹ The topic was "the expansion of the negro population in the last thirteen years" in the areas surrounding the university.² Coss wrote that Northern Manhattan's black population was encroaching on the "eastern limits of morningside park," moving "as far south as central park," and as close as 110th street.³ He urged President Butler to regard this as "another reason" among a litany of reasons "why we should control all the property opposite the University holdings on 116th. street and on Amsterdam avenue."⁴ Professor of politics Joseph McGoldrick wrote the accompanying memo, which was, essentially, a written summation of the demographic data featured on the map that also accompanied the letter made by the New York branch of the Urban League.⁵

According to the memo, "200,000 negroes" lived in Manhattan, half of them in "the largest and most prosperous negro settlement," Harlem.⁶ They lived between 125th and 149th street "from the Harlem River to St. Nicholas Park."⁷ That these documents were written by professors and sent to the university's president suggests that Harlem and its population was a concern, or, at least, a topic of interest at multiple levels of the university. The documents that were sent to President Butler were not mere summations of data, they were undoubtedly a call

¹ Columbia College, Columbia University, "An Oasis of Order: The Core Curriculum at Columbia College," [https:// www.college.columbia.edu/core/oasis/profiles/coss.php](https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/oasis/profiles/coss.php)

² Nicholas Murray Butler, "The Negro in New York City," Dec. 1, 1926, Arranged Correspondence, Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives, box 132, folder 8.

³ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives.

⁴ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives.

⁵ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives.

⁶ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives.

⁷ Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives.

to do something about the *negro problem*. Despite this however, Zeroing in, exclusively, on Columbia's relationship with Harlem obscures the position the neighborhood and its people were in during this time. Harlem and its residents were not regarded merely as a university problem, they were regarded as a public, city-wide nuisance. They were placed under a crude and very public social microscope in which they were scrutinized, in print media and in academic writing.

In 1925, a year before Coss forwarded his letter to Butler, the since-defunct social and political journal *Survey Graphic* dedicated an entire spread to Harlem, dubbing it "the mecca of the new negro."⁸ The issue featured contributions from the likes of Countee Cullen, W.E.B. Dubois, Melville J. Herskovits, Walter White, and Arthur Schomburg and covered topics as varied as the Harlem worker, the Harlem family, and the Harlem arts scene. Many of the issue's essays later appeared in writer Alain Locke's anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro*.⁹ Like Coss, the journal's editors commented on Harlem's growth and prosperity but unlike the documents Coss forwarded, the journal's writers did not consider Harlem a problem. The contributors instead declared the neighborhood the site of a rambunctious "new race spirit" in need of social commentary.¹⁰

These two examples of writing are radically different in tone and, frankly, do not belong to the same category. In the Columbia documents, for instance, Harlem was to be feared, but, for the journal's contributors, Harlem was a dynamic, if not beleaguered, space in need of contextualization. However, placing these two examples side by side does have a salutary effect. This move shows that once the neighborhood cemented itself as the black cultural, intellectual,

⁸ "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," *Survey Graphic*, March 1925.

⁹ Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925).

¹⁰ "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," *Survey Graphic*, 628.

artistic capitol, the neighborhood and its people were subjected to scrutiny by journalists, academics, and writers both within and outside the university. Even with writing that sought to contextualize social phenomena, the result was that black people as a social group were objectified. Alain Locke notes that the 1920's ushered in an era where "the Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader" were in a rush to lock down the essence of the "New Negro."¹¹ The "negro" was "more myth than man... a formula" rather "than a human being."¹² Now, *some* of the writing did attempt to contextualize the changing and uneven social conditions of Harlem and discuss the problem of "the color line," but, still, all the attention also meant that black people were considered curiosities or social problems to be solved. While this project takes its inspiration from the work of Neely Mckee and Francisco Hernandez, two previous seminar participants, whose papers take up the Columbia-Harlem dialectic, it endeavors to move away, momentarily, from that relationship.

Harlem's growth as a center of black life occurred as a result of the steady, gradual migration of black people to the state, a process which first began at the end of the eighteenth century and turn of the nineteenth century.¹³ In 1799, the New York State Legislature passed "an act of emancipation," which mandated that "children born of slave parents" would henceforth be free in the state of New York.¹⁴ By 1827, slavery ceased and "all slaves" in New York were suddenly liberated and "birth on the soil of New York" guaranteed free status, thus "slaves from

¹¹Locke, *New Negro*, 3.

¹²Locke, *New Negro*, 3.

¹³ Arnett G Lindsay. "The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861." *The Journal of Negro History*, 2 (April 1921): 190.

¹⁴Lindsay, "The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861," 190.

other states fled to New York” in droves to take advantage of this benefit and the city became, in effect, a place of asylum.¹⁵ The great migration, the gradual movement of black people from the south to the north, was no less significant in bringing black people to New York City.¹⁶ The migration not only laid the groundwork for Harlem as a black neighborhood, but also enabled the establishment of other northern black cities like Chicago and Philadelphia.¹⁷ The conditions in which this early black population found itself were uneven. In one respect, the “cessation of the sale of slaves” meant that black people were of little economic value to the white population.¹⁸ But, on the other hand, the promise and reality of emancipation meant new opportunities for them and they soon endeavored to learn a trade and secure work as laborers, while placing a heavy emphasis on improving their lot and their fortunes for future generations.¹⁹

Through the efforts of associations like the American Convention of Abolition Societies, the Free Orphan School “was established in 1821” alongside the “African free schools,” which were “maintained by the New York Manumission Society.”²⁰ Despite this institutional aid and their own self-driven efforts at mobility, black people faced “violence and patterns of social and residential segregation.”²¹ Arnett Lindsay writes that black people had difficulty furthering their vocational training and securing jobs in the trades.²² Their social position worsened with the influx of European immigrants who “got positions in most of the trades” black people sought

¹⁵ Lindsay, “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 190.

¹⁶ Lindsay, “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 190.

¹⁷ Gilbert Ossofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper Collins, 1963), 17.

¹⁸ Lindsay “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 191.

¹⁹ Lindsay “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 191.

²⁰ Lindsay “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 192.

²¹ Ossofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 35.

²² Lindsay, “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 193.

out.²³ The north was neither a full escape from southern racism nor was it a place where there was no resistance at all to “institutionalized discrimination.”²⁴ Despite efforts to ameliorate practices of racism there were still crude stereotypes about black people that shaped their experiences.

Mary Ovington notes that there was a persistent idea that black people were ill-suited for certain positions, most notably in “the mechanical arts” where they were especially underrepresented.²⁵ Since Manhattan was the center of industry in New York and also where the majority of black migrants lived, the barriers to employment coupled with rapid population growth meant that black people lived in harsh conditions. These living conditions were ethnically defined. That is, the black population lived “like the Italians and Jews,” in ethnically homogenous enclaves away from other social groups.²⁶ At the turn of the twentieth century, New York’s population was bursting at the seams, pushing black people from their downtown home, the five points district, into the San Juan section of midtown, and, finally, to Harlem.²⁷

Thus the “black mecca” grew out of “subtle and radical changes.”²⁸ Social inequality meant, in part, that black people could not shape narratives about their character or shape public perception about their social conditions. As Gilbert Osofsky notes, writers, clergy, and other public figures spread propaganda about the character of “Negro homes” in New York as early as 1842.²⁹

²³Lindsay, “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 194.

²⁴ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 35.

²⁵ Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1911): 113

²⁶ Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York*, 49.

²⁷ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 11.

²⁸ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 42.

²⁹ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 10.

Describing some local homes he visited, Charles Dickens wrote that they looked like places where “dogs would howl to lie.”³⁰ But, as black people established institutions and worked to improve their lot, they established newspapers to “present their cause to the public.”³¹ Black intellectuals and leaders recognized the power of the written word to shape public perception. At the time at which President Butler received Coss’s documents, Harlem circulated “three weekly newspapers,” one of the most important being the *Amsterdam News*.³² At the turn of the twentieth century, black intellectuals established academic and political journals.

In 1910, the N.A.A.C.P founded *Crisis* magazine, as a public “record of the darker races.”³³ W.E.B. Dubois served as the editor-in-chief and sometime contributor. The magazine’s inaugural issue laid out the magazine’s mission: “to set forth the facts...which show the dangers of race prejudice” in order to aid in the “advancement of men.”³⁴ The magazine made the case for studying the contemporary experience of “negroes,” and, more crucially, the *history* of black people across the world. The magazine’s editors felt its scholarly and popular work could aid in the fight for “the highest ideals of American democracy.”³⁵

In 1916, Four years after the *Crisis* was founded, Carter G. Woodson founded the *Journal for the Study of Negro Life*. Both journals were similar in scope. They took history as seriously as they did contemporary events with Woodson arguing that self-knowledge was the key to emancipation.³⁶ That argument was not unique to Woodson or Dubois. Even much earlier

³⁰ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 11.

³¹ Lindsay, “The Economic Conditions of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861,” 199.

³² Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives

³³ W.E.B. Dubois, *The Crisis Record of the Darker Races*,” 1, no. 1(November:1910): 3.

³⁴ *The Crisis Record of the Darker Races*,” 5.

³⁵ *The Crisis Record of the Darker Races*,” 5.

³⁶ Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Associated Publishers: 1933): 83.

than Woodson, who would not publish his seminal book *The Mis-Education of the Negro* until 1933, independent Historian Arturo Schomburg argued that black people had a rich history that transcended slavery.³⁷ Moreover, that history must not be regarded as the history of individuals but of “group achievement.” Black intellectuals used the written word to articulate their political positions and then they shaped a public narrative. They also refashioned their identities. In these journals, they defined the term *negro* for themselves.

The late anthropologist James Pritchett argued that this first generation of twentieth century black intellectuals defined *negro* as a pan-African term, which included all people of African-descent across the globe.³⁸ This is evident in their articles. The inaugural issue of *Crisis* included an extended commentary on “powerful negro empires in Sudan” and “the towns of Timbuctoo.”³⁹ Similarly, the *Journal of Negro History*’s inaugural edition featured articles about “the negroes of Cincinnati,” “African Civilization,” the early negro churches...and the west indies,” and “Negro culture in West Africa.”⁴⁰

By the 1920s, the character of the writing on black people and on Harlem shifted from a concern with social conditions and history to a fixation on vice and on individual character. In 1928, journalist Edward Doherty, dubbed “the star reporter of America,” wrote a series of articles for the daily mirror titled “hot harlem,” in which he commented on Harlem's cabaret culture.⁴¹ The series’ lead article was titled “King Lust’s Harlem Lash Whips White into Black”

³⁷ Arturo Schomburg, “the Negro Digs Up His Past,” in *The New Negro An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York:Albert & Charles Boni, 1925): 232.

³⁸ James Pritchett, Reflections on the State of African Studies (African Studies Association Annual Meeting, 2014).

³⁹*The Crisis Record of the Darker Races*,” 5.

⁴⁰ *Journal of Negro History*, 1, no.1 (January, 1916): 1-98.

⁴¹ Calvin J. Floyd. “‘Mirror’ Brands Sector Hot-Bed Of Vice, Jazz, Black-White Lust; Scores Protest,” Daily Mirror, July 30, 1928.

with the sub-header “home of vice” and commented on the “sex element,” notably between black men and white women.⁴² He claimed that Harlem was “the capital of miscegenation,” a place where primal urges ran amok.⁴³ He would build on these arguments in two follow-up articles in which he discussed relations between black female prostitutes and their white male customers.

Doherty’s articles drew widespread attention and protests from Harlem residents prompting his colleague Floyd J. Calvin to publicly chide him in print. To Calvin’s credit, he recognized the implication of Doherty, a white man, writing such disparaging articles about Harlem. Doherty was no ordinary reporter, as his own paper wrote, he was a voice of authority with a local and national platform; he had reach. He could codify a particular image of Harlem and disseminate it widely. In fact, Calvin’s response piece to Doherty’s work argued that his writing represented “the worst attack Harlem has suffered from a daily paper since the negro moved uptown.”⁴⁴ The fallout from Doherty’s articles was swift and severe. By the publication of his third essay, Harlem’s residents protested the paper prompting Doherty to go on the defense and claim that he only wrote “without bias, without exaggeration and with honesty.”⁴⁵

Despite Harlem’s protests, Doherty would publish a fourth article. This debacle underscores the power imbalance between journalists and Harlem’s negro population. It also demonstrates how easily commentary degenerated into crude racial stereotypes when it came to covering Harlem. Doherty was not the only writer covering Harlem, the Daily mirror was not the only paper publishing articles, and, moreover, writings on Harlem were not confined to the

⁴² Calvin J. Floyd. ‘Mirror.’

⁴³ Calvin J. Floyd. ‘Mirror.’

⁴⁴ Calvin J. Floyd. ‘Mirror.’

⁴⁵ Calvin J. Floyd. ‘Mirror.’

1920s. In 1930, reporter Beverly Smith, writing for the New York Herald, wrote a three part series titled “Harlem-The Negro City.”⁴⁶ The byline to his first piece read that his work would “give a true picture of Negro Harlem.”⁴⁷ Even more than Doherty’s writing, Smith’s article showed clearly how Harlem and its population was regarded by journalists. He justified his continued writing on Harlem by arguing that it was “the most interesting laboratory...in which to study” the American negro.

It was Smith's journalism that most directly referred to Harlem as a lab with which to test out theory. While Doherty saw a den of vice in Harlem, Smith saw an endless pool of poverty and dejection. To be fair, Smith argued that “the central problem of Harlem is economic.”⁴⁸ Thus it can be argued that he made an attempt to contextualize the hardships black people living in Harlem faced. In his second article, Smith wrote about Harlem’s housing crisis and argued that Harlem’s scarce living conditions and “overcrowding” informed the high rates of disease throughout the neighborhood.⁴⁹ But, the attempt at contextualization is undermined by Smith’s implication that Harlem’s problem is its people, not the social conditions in which the people live. In that same article, Smith wrote that “half the negroes” living in Harlem are “crowded in from the south and...west indies” bringing disease and “primitive notions of medicine.”⁵⁰ Smith saw struggle, degradation, and backwardness in Harlem. So unyielding was Smith’s argument that, as in the case of Doherty’s articles, it prompted a response. After the release of his second

⁴⁶ Beverly Smith. “Harlem- The Negro City,” New York Herald, February 10, 1930.

⁴⁷ Beverly Smith, “Harlem-The Negro City,” New York Herald, February 10, 1930.

⁴⁸ Beverly Smith, “Harlem-The Negro City,” New York Herlad, February 10, 1930.

⁴⁹ Beverly Smith “Harlem-The Negro City,” New York Herlad, February 12, 1930.

⁵⁰ Beverly Smith “Harlem-The Negro City,” New York Herlad, February 12, 1930.

article, the paper published an opinion piece in which a reader wondered aloud “the purpose behind putting Harlem under the social microscope” and “the public gaze.”⁵¹

The journalism sphere was not the only site which produced writings about Harlem, but it was one of the most consequential. Academia was no less complicit in disseminating crude stereotypes about Harlem. As Neely Mckee writes, Columbia’s flagship newspaper, the Spectator was uniquely fixated on crime in its reporting.⁵² In similar fashion to the larger city-wide newspapers, Spectator provided “little insight” into the underlying factors that enabled crime, instead reporting on events, sans context.⁵³ One example of this journalistic malpractice is the Spectator’s 1935 article, which reported on what is now regarded as the riot of 1935.⁵⁴

On March 19, 1935 “Lino Rivera, a sixteen year old colored boy” allegedly stole a knife from a store on 125th. street.⁵⁵ In response, the store’s employees subdued the young man and summoned the police.⁵⁶ As a struggle ensued inside the store, onlookers got a glimpse of the struggle and a crowd soon formed.⁵⁷ When the boy went out of sight of the crowd, the public assumed that the police were trying to hide their actions from plain view and surreptitiously kill him.⁵⁸ As word of the incident spread throughout the neighborhood, people congregated in public, holding meetings, and demanding more information as to the fate of the boy.⁵⁹ Groups as

⁵¹ D.J. Small “A Pack of Wolves,” New York Herald February 13, 1930.

⁵² Neely Mckee. “Columbia and Harlem: Contextualizing the History of Expansion with Administrative Narrative and Student Interactions, 1896- 1947,” Seminar Paper, (Columbia University: 2021):

⁵³ Mckee. Columbia and Harlem.”

⁵⁴ Andrew Khinoy, “ Frosh Walks Through Harlem Returns During Riots, Returns With Battered Shoulder From Attack,” Columbia Spectator, March 21, 1935

⁵⁵ Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem: A Report on the Social and Economic Conditions Responsible for the Outbreak of March 19, 1935* (New York: 1935): 2.

⁵⁶ Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁵⁷ Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁵⁸ Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁵⁹ Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

varied as the Young Communists League and Young Liberators became fixtures during this outbreak and soon the unrest grew into a riot.⁶⁰

One year later, The mayor's office convened a commission to study "the conditions in Harlem," and concluded that the riot was most directly the result of the Lino Rivera incident but also the result of "smoldering resentment" towards "discrimination and poverty."⁶¹ The report quoted one resident as saying that the police treatment of black people in New York was "just like down South where the lynch us."⁶² To the credit of the report, it identified six areas in need of remediation and attention for the betterment of Harlem's residents: education, issues related to policing, health, housing, discrimination in employment, and relief.⁶³ The Amsterdam News would go on to publish the report in full that same year.

None of this context was featured in Columbia Spectator's coverage of the riot. When they did run the story, it centered on "how freshman Hector Donnelly" wound up "caught in the outbreak of some 3000 negroes" during an evening jaunt along lenox avenue and 135th. street.⁶⁴ The piece recounted that Donnelly was taken in by police after "being hit with a milk jug."⁶⁵ The article states that rather than flee, Donnelly stayed to watch the scene, recounting that "he watched Negroes...laughingly throw" stones "through store windows."⁶⁶ Donnelly is left to conclude that it seemed like the "negroes" "were having a helluva good time."⁶⁷ The article did not provide any context for the events preceding the riot. Rather than exercise due diligence and

⁶⁰ Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁶¹ Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁶² Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁶³ Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, *The Negro in Harlem*, 2.

⁶⁴ Khinoy, "Frosh Walks Through Harlem."

⁶⁵ Khinoy, "Frosh Walks Through Harlem."

⁶⁶ Khinoy, "Frosh Walks Through Harlem."

⁶⁷ Khinoy, "Frosh Walks Through Harlem."

contextualize the violence as the mayor's report did, Spectator relied on crude stereotypes.

Neely Mckee argues that the reporting was indicative of the gulf that existed between the school and the neighborhood, with Harlem either feared or observed.⁶⁸ Student news reporting is not the only instance in which Columbia framed Harlem as a problem. Nor is it the only way in which power imbalances expressed themselves. Even more significantly than its journalism was the University's efforts at expansion. As Francisco Hernandez argues in his paper, Columbia University and Harlem's growth coincided.⁶⁹ At the same time that Harlem grew into the "negro mecca," Columbia, under the stewardship of Butler, pursued territorial expansion. If journalism had the effect of creating psychological distance between black residents and Columbia students, expansion sought to create geographic (and political) boundaries between the two.

Assuming office in 1901 and serving as President until 1945, Nicholas Butler is most responsible for Columbia university's (and Harlem's) trajectory in the early to mid-twentieth century. As Barry Bergdoll writes, from the beginning of his tenure, President Butler's had expansion on his mind.⁷⁰ He ramped up his efforts after world war I, and, in 1921 he "articulated a vision both of Columbia and of himself as a breed apart."⁷¹ Looking to Paris and Berlin as an example, Butler envisioned a university that could have a say in city and national affairs.⁷² As President, Butler was less concerned about the daily affairs of a university and more focused on matters "that affect the prosperity, the influence, and the prestige of the university as a whole."⁷³

⁶⁸ Mckee. "Columbia and Harlem."

⁶⁹ Francisco Hernandez. "Columbia and Harlem: The Beginning," Seminar Paper (Columbia University: 2018).

⁷⁰ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 77.

⁷¹ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 77.

⁷² Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 77.

⁷³ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 77.

Butler likened his role as President of Columbia to “the English prime minister holding the portfolios of foreign affairs and of the treasury...” meaning that he as “the administrative head of Columbia University is neither a college President nor even a university president...” for “his duties are unique because Columbia is unique.”⁷⁴ He “saw his office in political terms,” as an endeavor connected to his other roles in the city: like his place on the boards of multiple city banks and insurance companies.⁷⁵ Expansion efforts took place with both an eye towards the school’s future and a concern about Harlem’s future.⁷⁶ In 1920, efforts were underway to expand laboratories and towers on 120th street with the idea that Columbia could be the eye of the hurricane, the architectural focus of the area.⁷⁷ In fact, there was a mandate in place to build high so as to ensure “commanding views both of and from low library.”

Columbia’s future was not always guaranteed and public and alumni discontent grew. The board of trustees expressed concern over a perceived decline of the upper west side (which was home to the San Juan district) and expansion was framed as a bulwark against those changes. Butler retired in 1945, but his vision still guided the direction of the university. It would take three years before the university found a new President. In 1947, Howard coon published a scathing rebuke of Butler arguing, interestingly, that Butler’s expansionist aspirations clashed with the university’s mission to be centered around the college.⁷⁸ The trustees responded by

⁷⁴ Barry Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim’s Plan: Columbia’s First Century on Morningside Heights* (New York: The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York): 77.

⁷⁵ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim’s Plan*, 77.

⁷⁶ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim’s Plan*, 77.

⁷⁷ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim’s Plan*, 83.

⁷⁸ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim’s Plan*, 98.

putting forth a series of proposals that were, ironically, initiatives that grew out of Butler's vision.⁷⁹

In 1945, Butler wrote a confidential memo to the trustees, rebuffing concerns about his hubris, and, once again making the case for expansion.⁸⁰ He wrote that his "ambition" was "to have the University own all the property between 114th street and 122nd streets."⁸¹ In the letter discusses the university's future and the need to, from a development standpoint, prepare for that move. He was more naked about the racial element of his expansionist aspirations and wrote that the university must "protect ourselves against invasion from Harlem or from the north."⁸²

Geography was thought of as a necessary barrier, with Morningside Park a clear line of demarcation between the university and the undesirables. These initiatives crystallized into the establishment of, in 1947, Morningside height inc., which became the "the sponsor of the city's first... redevelopment project, Morningside-Manhattanville."⁸³ And, it was this effort that set the stage for the battles between Columbia and Harlem in 1968.⁸⁴

As domineering as Columbia was and as crushing as poverty is, neither defined what it meant to be black. What many writers and thinkers from outside the community failed to see or acknowledge was the evidence of black people's wherewithal. The "African Society of Mutual Relief," was, in essence, a black business, founded in 1808 and continued into the twentieth

⁷⁹ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 98.

⁸⁰ Nicholas Murray Butler to Marcellus Dodge, "Confidential Memorandum to the Board of Trustees," January 7, 1947, Arranged Correspondence, Butler Papers, Columbia University Libraries, Box 116.

⁸¹ Nicholas Murray Butler to Marcellus Dodge, "Confidential Memorandum.

⁸² Nicholas Murray Butler to Marcellus Dodge, "Confidential Memorandum.

⁸³ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 99.

⁸⁴ Bergdoll, *Mastering McKim's Plan*, 99.

century.⁸⁵ The African Grove became a black artistic center.⁸⁶ There is no authentic story of Harlem or of African Americans. But, what this study demonstrates is that there are individual biases and institutional patterns that misrepresent reality. Contemporary students may claim that this point is obvious, but that would be arrogant and unhelpful. The persistence of these powerful institutions (Columbia is certainly not going anywhere) endowed with the power to shape public opinion (and wield the power of the state) necessitates the continued, painstaking historical work that challenges these dynamics. Students, scholars, journalists must also question the nature of their enterprise. In a powerful critique of western social science, Sociologists Oyeronke Oyewumi and Troy Duster suggest that academia has not moved away from essentialist academic conclusions, rather, it has repackaged them.⁸⁷ Thus, whether scholars seek to offer an economic, cultural, or political explanation for social phenomena, they are still studying social groups and drawing conclusions about them. The disciplines have failed to capture the dynamism of a people (and have also failed to offer new research models). Persistent patterns of stratification along racial and class lines means that the proximity and intimacy needed to write about, for example, African American life in a humane way in journalism is not there. Writers and scholars must regroup and reconsider (or cease) their enterprise.

⁸⁵ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 11.

⁸⁶ Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, 11.

⁸⁷ Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 5.

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