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Columbia University and Slavery

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Defining a University: *Spectator*, Harlem, and the Crowning of Morningside Heights

In an April 1901 edition of the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, recent alumnus William Aspenwal Bradley declares that he has “two distinct impressions of Columbia and Columbia life.” The first, he writes, “is of the old site and the chaotic and rather ineffectual life that choked its congested campus. The second is of that uplifted and spacious Quadrangle on Morningside, with the fine new spirit.” Bradley boasts about the new intellectual, refined ethos that has developed alongside the University’s new campus: “As a stage set for a mighty spectacle, the eyes of academic America are fixed with renewed interest in what Columbia shall do and say.”¹

As some of the first writers to both characterize Morningside Heights and inquire about Columbia’s relationship with Harlem, student journalists at the *Columbia Spectator* played a pivotal role in situating the University after its move uptown in 1896. The newspaper was widely read, and their pieces contributed to a new campus culture and common vocabulary for Columbia men.

A project based in Columbia student journalism serves two main purposes. First, *Spectator* provides a direct lens into how students perceived themselves. Letters to the editor, opinion editorials, columns, and even formal feature pieces all display students’ understanding of their role on the new campus. Secondly, examining advertisements and faculty statements demonstrate how an insular white community guarded “Morningside Heights” as an elite

¹ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLIV, Number 45, 2 April 1901

neighborhood of intellectuals and upper class figures. This paper explores three spheres of *Spectator*'s influence: the rhetorical construction of Columbia, the promotion and framing of a luxury real estate market, and the erasure or perversion of Black art. I find *Spectator* acted as an extension of the University's attempt to establish a new brand or class for itself through the physical move. The administration carefully oversaw the newspaper's activity and often used *Spectator* as a platform for longer public statements. However, *Spectator* and its staff were a crucial force on their own, forging Columbia's desired image as an elite figurehead of the city. The newspaper gradually created a firm, dichotomous relationship between the University and Harlem. Columbia stands not only as a home for an academic class, but the wealthy and powerful. Harlem's culture and inhabitants are, at best, unknown in the student newspaper, even while Black musical icons provided on-campus entertainment. In its more sinister characterizations, *Spectator* would rely on minstrelsy and refuse to cover landmarks of the Harlem Renaissance.

The Move Uptown: Defining a New Era

In 1896, the *Columbia Spectator* stood as the sole college news source for students and alumni — the paper absorbed its competitor, *Acta Columbiana*, in 1885, and the *Columbia University Quarterly* would only begin covering Morningside Heights news for a more general audience in 1898.² It is important to note that *Spectator* embodies a white community's perspective on Harlem, the adjacent neighborhood excluded from Morningside Heights' careful boundaries. By the 1930s, over 70 percent of residents in Harlem were Black.³ While Columbia

² McCaughey, Robert. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 202

³ Prince, Sabiyha Robin. "Changing Places: Race, Class, And Belonging In The 'New' Harlem." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 31, no. 1 (2002): 5–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40553555>.

admitted a single Black applicant to the School of Mines in the 19th century, the first Black student at Columbia College would graduate in 1906. Columbia would not grant a scholarship to a student from Harlem until 1927, and admissions did not actively seek and invite Black applicants until the 1960s.⁴ Thus, an overwhelmingly white student body marked the first half-century of Columbia's Morningside Heights campus, and these same students created the newspaper issues this paper explores.

An April 1896 edition of *Spectator* contains some of student journalists' first conceptualizations of Columbia as a university uptown, serving as an apt starting point for investigating how University journalism forged and defined the relationship between Columbia and the surrounding community. Months before undergraduates would study at the new campus and directly report on the Morningside Heights neighborhood, *Spectator* asserts its journalistic authority, lays out a vision of Columbia as a figurehead in New York, and even suggests the University ought to look towards future expansion.

An introduction section both speaks for and includes the undergraduate body in discourse. The author, speaking as a collective "Spectator", illustrates a small, intimate community. While he comments broadly on Columbia affairs such as the fraternity system, recent campus productions, and academic changes, he also discusses professors' battles with illnesses and individual students' accomplishments. The section is signed off with "For the Class" by the newspaper's Secretary, W.D. Woodward.⁵ Although Woodward imbues the editorial with his own opinion while writing as "Spectator", the paper would not be legally

⁴ McCaughey, Robert. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University*. Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 282; *Ibid*, pp. 426

⁵ *Columbia Spectator*, Volume XXXVIII, Number 4, 29 April 1896

independent of the University until 1962. This April edition includes an announcement for the official dedication of the new Morningside campus, which would occur on May 2nd, 1896:

Columbia has grown with this vast city of ours. As the city enlarged, so Columbia has been pushed further and further to the north. Now she has, as it were, struck upon solid ground. The city will flow around her, but may never crowd her way again...her classic walls will look out over the city for miles and miles, and gather in to her, as the seat of learning, all students in the city.⁶

This narrative creates an almost antagonistic relationship between the growing city and Columbia — though Woodward suggests Columbia was gradually “pushed” to its new location, its 67 block move from 343 Madison Avenue was a calculated plan that would abandon an “impressive array” of existing university buildings and cost at least 6 million dollars.⁷ The University had acquired the plot of land uptown from an asylum and adjacent properties four years prior to the move.⁸ Even as Columbia prepared to geographically isolate itself from a growing, diverse immigrant population, Woodward speaks authoritatively about the University’s role for “all students” in New York City.

A shift from biweekly to weekly publishing accompanied the transition uptown. In the same edition’s “Correspondence” section, former editors and affiliates write to the Editorial Board, all in agreement that *Spectator* should publish University affairs once a week. Archibald Douglas, the Managing Editor of *Spectator* from 1892 until 1893, writes that the *Spectator* has always “used its force and influence in the shaping of college affairs.” He notes that “a bi-weekly newspaper is no longer abreast of the times... *Spectator* should constantly broaden her scope to keep pace with the development of Columbia.” Douglas’s letter offers valuable insight into how students and recent alum may have viewed university journalism — the physical expansion

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ McCaughey, Robert. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 207

⁸ *The New York Herald*, October 22nd, 1882

invites an increasingly powerful rhetorical voice, as well. Another contributor identified only as “Senior” praises the newspaper for a “gradual elevation in tone wholly consistent with the growth of refinement and the development of culture”, and an anonymous alum compliments the “business-like” manner of the paper, noting he always receives his copy punctually. These letters suggest that *Spectator* sought respect as both a news source and business endeavor. Moreover, the letter from “Senior” frames *Spectator* as an extension of the University’s attempt to establish a new intellectual and cultural era for itself through the physical move.

After one full year on the Morningside Campus, *Spectator* ran a two-page letter from the Dean of Columbia College, J. H. Van Amringe. He writes that the “stately buildings upon this site” mark the “the crown of this cosmopolitan city that is the gateway of a continent” and “a fit Temple of the Humanities”.⁹ Amringe also assures the student body that they are destined to be on such a campus: “Surely, the Columbia College student of to-day may well say: ‘The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a godly heritage.’”¹⁰ One year after the move, this *Spectator* feature likens the Morningside Heights campus to fate or something divinely owed to Columbian men. Student commentary followed suit in this characterization of Columbia and what is owed to their students. An opening letter in a May 1903 issue asserts that men must embrace Columbia College traditions as their “birth-right and inheritance”.¹¹

Among the language used to describe Morningside Heights, “acropolis” stands out. President Seth Low was one of the first to coin the term, deeming the site of the Morningside campus as the University’s “natural home” and a refuge from “the noise and disturbance of surrounding life.”¹² In a parting letter to the Class of 1903, a graduating *Spectator* writer asserts

⁹ Columbia Spectator, Volume XLI, Number 29, 21 December 1898

¹⁰ Columbia Spectator, Volume XLI, Number 29, 21 December 1898

¹¹ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLVI, Number 152, 2 May 1903

¹² Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XXXV, Number 4, 21 November 1894

that “[his class] first made the acropolis of New York our stronghold.”¹³ The newspaper framed the completion of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine as “the crowning glory” of a “new Acropolis” that would surpass the beauty of ancient Athens.¹⁴ Certainly, “acropolis” may be an accurate title in reference to Columbia’s Greek-inspired architecture. Yet the name — translating to “high city” — sets Columbia on a figurative hill. *Spectator*’s persistent use solidifies this moniker. Other publications contributed as well, with *Harper’s Weekly* calling the new campus location “Our Acropolis” and a “segregated and cloistered quarter devoted to the humanities” in 1897.¹⁵

Spectator draws rigid boundaries around this Acropolis. In the article on Saint John the Divine, a writer illustrates the architectural landscape of Morningside Heights. The Cathedral, he writes, is flanked by Saint Luke’s Hospital on the North side, “magnificent college buildings” on the Northwest side, and Morningside Park, a “place of simple beauty”, to the East.¹⁶ This description draws a clear delineation between Morningside Heights and the surrounding community. Harlem is barred from any association with the “Acropolis”: the Cathedral, Hospital, and Morningside Park form a daunting physical partition. This description also broadens Columbia’s reach and gives an implicit mandate for continued growth — any nearby building that is grand or prestigious is an unquestioned part of the Acropolis. The University is melded with unaffiliated institutions under one, cohesive title to form an expansive uptown project.

¹³ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLVI, Number 171 & 172, 8 June 1903

¹⁴ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLIX, Number 83, 23 January 1925

¹⁵ Harper’s Weekly, Volume 41, Issue 2110, 13 February 1897

¹⁶ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLIX, Number 83, 23 January 1925

A Growing Influence: The Real Estate Market and *Spectator's* Finances

In October of 1900, *Spectator* began profiting from advertisements for the real estate market that was rapidly growing around the University. Upscale residential buildings reaffirmed Columbia's brand as much as the University drew developers to the area. In regularly featuring these advertisements, *Spectator* both projects an exclusive image of the neighborhood while aiding gentrification.

PANORAMIC VIEWS FROM THE HILLCREST APARTMENTS.



Photograph taken from Hillcrest Looking North.




HILLCREST is that splendid achievement in Apartment House Architecture which towers above the Hudson on the crest of Cathedral Heights in 116th Street, between Morningside Park and Riverside Drive, adjoining Columbia University. HILLCREST is designed to be the home of the cultured and intellectual class which is fast forming a new colony in the neighborhood of Columbia University.

Those that can appreciate large, sunny and sumptuously finished rooms—rooms that compare favorably with those of a wide private residence—are invited to inspect the apartments in HILLCREST. There are three suites of 9 rooms, besides the bath, on each floor. Every room is large and sunny.

The appointments and conveniences, and the general tone of the building, are on a par with the finest house in the city. Among the conveniences are Otis elevator, electric light, long distance telephone in each apartment, mail chute, servants' baths, butlers' pantries, abundant closets, etc. Rents \$1,500 to \$1,650.

SLAWSON & HOBBS, Agents,
284 COLUMBUS AVENUE, NEAR 73D ST. Tel. 341 Riverside.



PLAN OF TOP FLOOR



VIEW FROM HILLCREST LOOKING WESTWARD.

1900 advertisement for Hillcrest Apartments, placed by Slawson & Hobbs Agents.

A recurring patron, Hillcrest Apartments, ran half and full page advertisements in nearly every 1900 issue, as well as several in the *New York Daily Tribune*. One advertisement reads that Hillcrest “is designed to be the home of the cultured and intellectual class which is fast forming a

new colony in the neighborhood of Columbia University.”¹⁷ Similar to language from Woodward and the Columbia College Dean, the Hillcrest spread frames Columbia as establishing a new, elite class of people through its physical claiming of land and formation of a new “colony”. Hillcrest relies on the new Columbia campus architecture to sell their building to potential tenants, filling a significant portion of the page with sweeping views of Low Memorial Library, the Columbia South Lawn, and the plot of land that would soon be Butler Library. Notably, while the Hillcrest advertisement shows windows facing each cardinal direction, only the views showcasing the Columbia campus are featured. “Panoramic views” excludes Morningside Park, which had been recently completed under esteemed architect Calvert Vaux, the designer of Central Park. Critics deemed Morningside “the most consummate piece of art that [Vaux] had ever created” only five years before Hillcrest would exclude its image from advertisements.¹⁸ The benefit, though, is clearly mutual: Real estate speculators and the Columbia administration worked hand in hand to develop the uptown land and attract a suitable community.¹⁹ Hillcrest explicitly describes the area as the “neighborhood of Columbia University”, reinforcing the idea of Columbia as central.

It is also important to note the advertisers strategically chose to place their advertisements in both the *New York Daily Tribune* and *Spectator*. For 1,500 to 1,650 dollars a month for rent, Hillcrest apartments would have a monthly cost of over 50,000 in 2022.²⁰ Certainly, we can assume they knew students and professors would be a significant part of *Spectator*’s readership. But Hillcrest’s advertisement placement may also tell us that some of the wealthiest people in

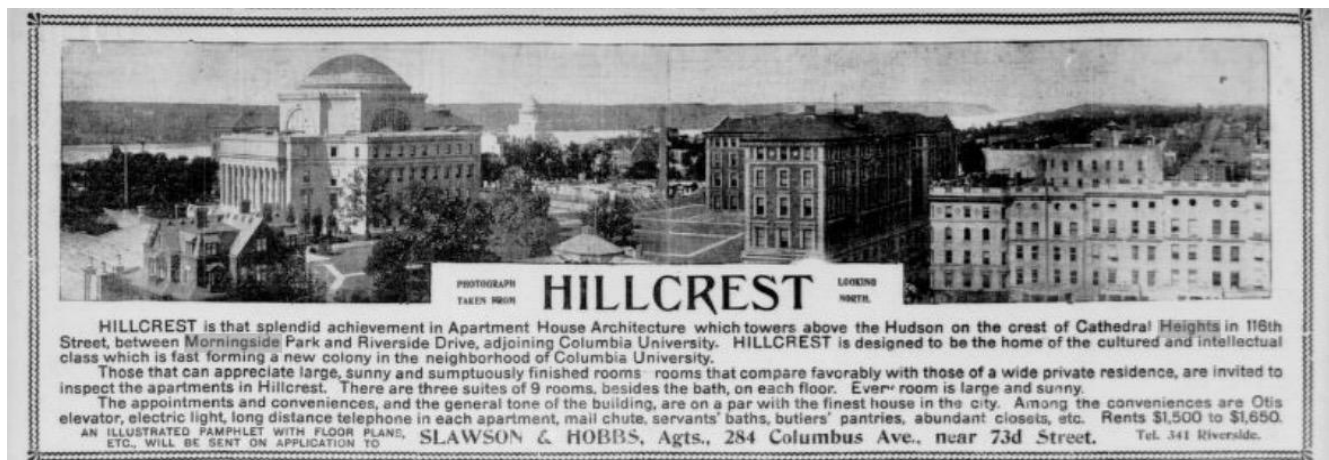
¹⁷ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLIX, Number 83, 23 January 1925

¹⁸ Shockley, Jay (July 15, 2008). "Morningside Park". New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

¹⁹ Dolkart, Andrew S. “Building for the Mind I: Columbia University and the Transformation of Morningside Heights.” *Morningside Heights: A History of Its Architecture and Development*, Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 103–55. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/dolk07850.10>. Accessed 21 Dec. 2022.

²⁰ “CPI Inflation Calculator.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

early 19th century New York were paying attention to Columbia student journalists, or at least paying attention to the affairs of the University through *Spectator*. McCaughey notes that “wealth, locale, and presidential leadership” all favored Columbia before World War I. He argues that Columbia was poised to definitively become the “best American University” — other Ivy League competitors were limited by poor location, finances, or few opportunities for growth.²¹ The “smart money”, he writes, “was on Columbia.”²² Thus, the *Spectator* Editorial Board found themselves as the primary reporters for a burgeoning uptown community eager to know about University happenings, not just students and faculty. Their consistent feature of Hillcrest and other luxury buildings carefully constructs an image of Morningside Heights as for an elite class.



A shortened version of the 1900 Hillcrest advertisement, featuring only the Northern view of Columbia.

Beyond the Hillcrest spreads, *Spectator* regularly published calls from surrounding buildings for tenant applications. The language in each advertisement is surprisingly uniform: many include references to wealth and status, whether through euphemisms or overt statements. In 1902, The Altamonte boasted about their “luxurious” rooms for the “high class”.²³ A 1906

²¹ McCaughey, Robert. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 232

²² *Ibid*, 233

²³ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLVI, Number 5, 10 October 1902

sublet advertisement for The Hillcrest calls for a “high class bachelor” to occupy a two room apartment.²⁴ Another luxury building, The Acropolis, appears to capitalize on Morningside Heights’ new informal name. One 1909 advertisement for The Van Gorden plainly states their offer and ideal candidates: “Newly furnished. Refined people. Near Riverside.”²⁵

Spectator’s profits — and the University’s demonstrated interest in the magazine — grew in the same period they began publishing luxury real estate advertisements. By 1917, *Spectator* consistently made over 2,000 dollars a month, or around 55,000 dollars today, with the majority of revenue coming from advertisers.²⁶ Subscriptions from students, alumni, and New York City residents made up the second largest source of revenue. In the first semester of the 1917 school year, *Spectator* earned nearly 1,700 dollars from selling year-long subscriptions, with each subscription selling for 2 dollars locally or 4 dollars by mail.²⁷ The Editorial Board was closely monitored by the University during this period of growth. Students had to meet strict criteria for grades, maintain a clean disciplinary record, and submit confirmation of their eligibility each semester in order to remain on staff. Frank D. Fackenthal, the Chairman of the University Committee on Student Organizations, kept a watchful eye on *Spectator*’s activity and held the editors to notably high standards. In one 1916 letter to the *Spectator* Editor-in-Chief, he urges the Board to issue a “very severe reprimand” for the use of the word “damn”. Fackenthal writes that both the author and his editor ought to “be made to feel a full responsibility” for the “loose” writing.²⁸

²⁴ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume XLIX, Number 127, 22 March 1906

²⁵ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LIII, Number 1, 22 September 1909

²⁶ Columbia Spectator - Financial Statement, May 15, 1917. Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations records, 1905-1919 (Box 2); “CPI Inflation Calculator.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

²⁷ Columbia Spectator - Financial Statement, May 15, 1917. Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations records, 1905-1919 (Box 2)

²⁸ Letter from Frank D. Fackenthal to James W. Allison Jr., January 25th, 1916. Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations records, 1905-1919 (Box 2)

The Columbia administration also actively shielded the publication from journalistic and financial competitors, apparently recognizing *Spectator* as instrumental for their own purposes. In February of 1913, a letter from the University Committee on Student Organizations details why students from the School of Journalism were barred from creating their own publication in the wake of the undergraduate periodical's success. Geddes Smith, the President of Staff for Columbia Alumni News, urges that potential editors be "prohibited from soliciting advertising from firms now advertising in campus periodicals" as the "advertising field is already well worked". The University, Geddes writes, ought not to be connected to any "unsuccessful enterprise" when "the New York press ... [have shown] a great deal of interest in [Columbia]".²⁹ Even *Jester*, the satirical magazine that would later become *The Federalist*, fell under apparent scrutiny. The outgoing *Jester* Editor-in-Chief wrote a five page letter to Fackenthal urging the administration to continue publication after the Student Organizations Committee questioned the magazine's value.³⁰ Though *Spectator* received regular feedback, its position as the primary undergraduate publication was consistently defended by the University.

"The Suburbs of Columbia": *Spectator*'s Erasure of the Harlem Renaissance and Perversion of Black Art

In October of 1919, *Spectator* announced a new biweekly column, "The Suburbs of Columbia", meant to showcase New York artistic life in written "tours" with "competent guides". The announcement declares that "for cultural purposes" the editors "shall consider all of

²⁹ Letter from Geddes Smith to Herbet G. Lord, February 24th, 1913. Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations records, 1905-1919 (Box 2)

³⁰ Letter from Tom Schary Jr. to Frank D. Fackenthal, June 10th, 1915. Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations records, 1905-1919 (Box 2)

the city's fields of art as 'The Suburbs of Columbia'." In this naming, *Spectator* implicitly frames Columbia as the centerpiece of the New York City arts scene. The introduction goes on to outline its goal, helping "college men realize how thoroly delightful from a cultural point of view is the world just beyond the college grounds."

This proposal could be seen as a genuine attempt to showcase a diverse landscape of artists. Yet the column — which would continue until 1930 — overlaps with the height of the Harlem Renaissance. The Suburbs of Columbia launched a period of student journalists attempting to characterize New York City culture as it evolved. At the same time, *Spectator* lauded the consumption of Black art in more tolerable formats for a Columbia audience. All-white jazz venues, dances that mocked Black traditions, and even minstrelsy were acceptable introductions of Black culture for *Spectator*.

These repeated attempts to erase or govern a Black cultural revolution further distanced the University's student body from the fast-growing Black population in Harlem. Crucially, writers and editors chose *not* to include significant centers of Black music in their depiction of a lively urban arts scene. Mixed-race clubs that best cultivated the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance — like the Lenox Club, the Plantation Inn, and the Renaissance Casino and Ballroom — were not covered in "The Suburbs of Columbia" once. A 1929 review of "Harlem: A Play in Three Acts", which premiered in midtown Manhattan, categorizes the titular neighborhood as "a raw piece of New York" that is "little known to the majority of the inhabitants".³¹

Spectator would, however, advertise or write reviews for The Cotton Club, a popular nightclub that hosted exclusively white audiences, over 30 times. The club's high ticket prices

³¹ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LIII, Number 29, 6 November 1929

and famed Black performers cultivated a regular crowd of New York's most elite patrons. The entertainers and most of the staff, however, were Black. Columbia student journalists often joined the audience at the Cotton Club and were among the first to review new songs by Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington, boasting about "the best well-behaved bands in captivity."³² By 1937, *Spectator* was promoting Columbia-endorsed events held at the Cotton Club. One article advertising ticket sales for a dance with Cab Calloway, "Harlem's native son", promises that the event will rival the "celebrated Junior Prom."³³ Cotton Club represented a safe space to explore this cultural renaissance — in promoting or attending events there, *Spectator* writers knew that the audience would be similar to the student body. The newspaper's consistent coverage of this venue advances a white vision of a Black artistic revolution.

While this column ran, *Spectator* also advertised popular student "Hoodoo" dances in the late 1920s. These events drew from the Black spiritual folk system of Hoodoo, warping the sacred tradition into a "strange" and "peculiar" theme for white students.³⁴ *Spectator* amplified each event with longform reviews and praise for the dances. One "Hoodoo" dance announcement reads:

New York's own Harlem has not been tardy in contributing its bit to the work of the negro on the stage. The members of the hall committee felt that a good colored orchestra with entertainment would be appreciated by the "dormites" and the Campus in general. The office of the New Yorker was solicited for information regarding the best negro orchestra in Harlem. They suggested Small's Paradise as the highest class night club with the best music in and about Seventh Avenue. P'fess Charlie Johnson who plays there nightly with his band is going to provide the music for the John Jay Dance.³⁵

³² Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LVIII, Number 68, 17 January 1935

³³ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LXI, Number 61, 20 December 1937

³⁴ McCarthy, John P. Review of *MOJO WORKIN': The Old African American Hoodoo System*, by Katrina Hazzard-Donald. *American Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 147-148. doi:10.1353/ams.2015.0009.

³⁵ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LI, Number 46, 1 December 1927

This 1927 article confirms that the event committee not only desired jazz music, but specifically sought Black performers for the night. Columbia students, or “dormites” who hardly venture outside of their residential halls, are enticed by “a good colored orchestra”, apparently drawn to what might be foreign to them. *Spectator* suggests that organizers valued exclusivity and prestige in soliciting the New Yorker for “the best negro orchestra.” This detail also reveals students’ lack of knowledge about the surrounding arts scene: Small’s Paradise was not an obscure venue, but regarded as one of the most successful bands in New York. Charlie “Fess” Johnson’s excellence solidified Small’s Paradise as an invaluable part of the Harlem Renaissance and development of a Black music scene.³⁶

A January 1928 advertisement reads that the “committee [was again] fortunate in securing the noted team of blackamoors from Small's Paradise.” It notes that Johnson said he would “suttinly be proud” to play at Columbia a second time, with the writer’s spelling of “certainly” as “suttinly” imitating African American vernacular.³⁷ In an announcement for another event in 1928, student reporters note that the popular characters “Mamie” and “Papa” would be present.³⁸ It is unclear whether any minstrel performers, or white performers who darkened their face in dramatic impersonations of Black men and women, joined the band onstage. Still, the language of “Mamie” and “Papa” is a clear reference to recurring characters in minstrel shows. Racial caricatures of a “mammy” figure perpetuated an image of a content and loyal slave. Her counterpart, “old darky” or “old uncle”, stood as the gentle patriarch of the Black family, often defined by his close relationship with his enslaver.³⁹ We can reasonably

³⁶ Smith, Virginia Whatley. “The Harlem Renaissance and Its Blue-Jazz Traditions: Harlem and Its Places of Entertainment.” *Obsidian II* 11, no. 1/2 (1996): 21–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44502721>.

³⁷ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LI, Number 60, 4 January 1928

³⁸ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LI, Number 66, 12 January 1928

³⁹ Bloomquist, Jennifer. “The Minstrel Legacy: African American English and the Historical Construction of ‘Black’ Identities in Entertainment.” *Journal of African American Studies* 19, no. 4 (2015): 410–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44508238>.

assume that the student body held knowledge of minstrel tropes, and many students likely attended minstrel performances themselves. Reviews of the annual Varsity Show display photographs of actors in blackface and praise them for their “natural comedy.”⁴⁰ *Spectator* employs minstrelsy language to sell tickets, relying on students’ prior engagement with the practice.

This language undoubtedly distances Black communities from Columbia. Minstrel shows weaponize caricatures to reinforce racial hierarchies and subordinate Black Americans. Yet, *Spectator* and the student body appeared eager to repeatedly host Johnson and his band — student journalists reported that every “Hoodoo” dance was sold out. Small’s Paradise presented a unique opportunity to experience Black culture without actually venturing past the Columbia gates. Students actively reveled in and celebrated the music of the Harlem Renaissance: *Spectator* writes that the band entertainment was “enthusiastically received’ and that Johnson was “well known on campus.”⁴¹ Simultaneously, the reliance on minstrel stock characters marginalizes the Black band and reasserts Columbia students’ position as members of an elite, white community. Johnson and Small’s Paradise is ostracized from Columbians even as they perform within John Jay Hall. Though they appear to be celebrated, the performers effectively become characters in a night of dramatic entertainment. The “Hoodoo” label further separates Johnson’s band from the Columbia student body. A white audience does not experience the band as an innovative, talented group, but only views the performers as part of a peculiar theme.

⁴⁰ *Jester*, Volume 15, Number 8, June 1915; Varsity Show Records; Box I, Series II; University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

⁴¹ Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LI, Number 60, 4 January 1928; Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume LI, Number 139, 4 May 1928

Conclusion

Spectator proved a fierce advocate for an Acropolis-like vision of Columbia. Both the newspaper and the University administration would assert Columbia's excellence and its place as the rightful inhabitant of the uptown land. Together, they jointly constructed a particular image of Morningside Heights and drew rhetorical boundaries alongside architectural ones.

The examples from *Spectator* amount to more than merely misrepresenting history. Exclusionary language espoused in early issues of the newspaper is still used to characterize Columbia today. The University continues to attract a sizable real estate market while essential community centers are displaced. And, when we lose the complete picture of Harlem as a genesis of our current music and art, we frame it as inessential.