Gouverneur Morris: Alumnus Ahead of His Time?

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Early Life and Family Ties

The life of King's College alumnus and American founding father Gouverneur Morris was intertwined with a turning point in the nation's history that questioned colonialism, aristocracy, representation, and even slavery. Morris' place in the story of Columbia University is now remembered with esteem because of his support for the American Revolution and role in co-writing the United States Constitution. He is known mainly as one of the school's earliest graduates and one of the strongest allies of abolition from the Revolutionary era: a historical character now larger than life. Understanding the context of his upbringing, his education, and his political contemporaries, however, gives a grounded explanation for why Morris garnered the historical fame he did and why his attempts at enacting gradual abolition or blocking the ⅗ clause did not succeed. The narrative of Morris as a "self-denying" man can be complicated by documents in his personal collection and diary, namely his documented relationship with his father, his employment of servants, and his indenture of a young girl.[1] Revisiting his biography is valuable so as to not allow for an oversimplified view of his character to present itself, whether with a positive slant or a negative one. The exercise also serves to add deeper research on Morris to the Columbia and Slavery project, inserting his name into the article catalog to help represent the early days of Columbia's history.[2] Even with his warts and all, Morris prevailed as a revolutionary as compared to his relatives, to his peers in Congress, and, as is crucial to this essay, to his peers at King's. Due to his aristocratic upbringing, Morris often reflected the norms

[1]McCaughey, Robert; Stand Columbia: a history of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004, Columbia University Press, 2003, 47.
[2]Columbia University & Slavery: A Research and Justice Initiative, https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/.

of his class, proving to be a product of his time in many ways. In his revolutionary stance on domestic slavery, however, he was not only an “alumnus ahead of his time” as Columbia remembers him, but he was distinctly an alumnus ahead of Columbia itself.[3]

The aforementioned documents that comprise the primary research of this biography of Morris primarily include the “Governeur Morris papers” at the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) and the second volume of Morris’ diary as published online. The former collection almost exclusively includes Morris’ own words about himself and his life, presenting information on his character and intellectual priorities via his writing of letters and speeches. The latter provides more information about his day-to-day life, with a more private (and often revealing) point of view. Relying on Morris’ own words and not the voices of his peers or any members of the enslaved population Morris had public opinions about, the following research primarily interrogates his internal opinions and motivations, rather than his interactive role during the period. The context of his writings is supplemented by several biographies of him and what is now Columbia University. The last book-length biography of Morris was published in 2005 so, again, revisiting his biography with a focus on his identity as a King’s College alumnus attempts to prevent over-simplification of his historical role, especially on the part of the Columbia public relations team. In terms of biographies of the school, both Robert McCaughey and Eric Foner’s reports actually did dedicate a fair amount of space to the Morris family. This inclusion suggested Gouverneur’s importance in the history of the college, but did not necessarily offer a full alumnus biography of him as this essay attempts to do.

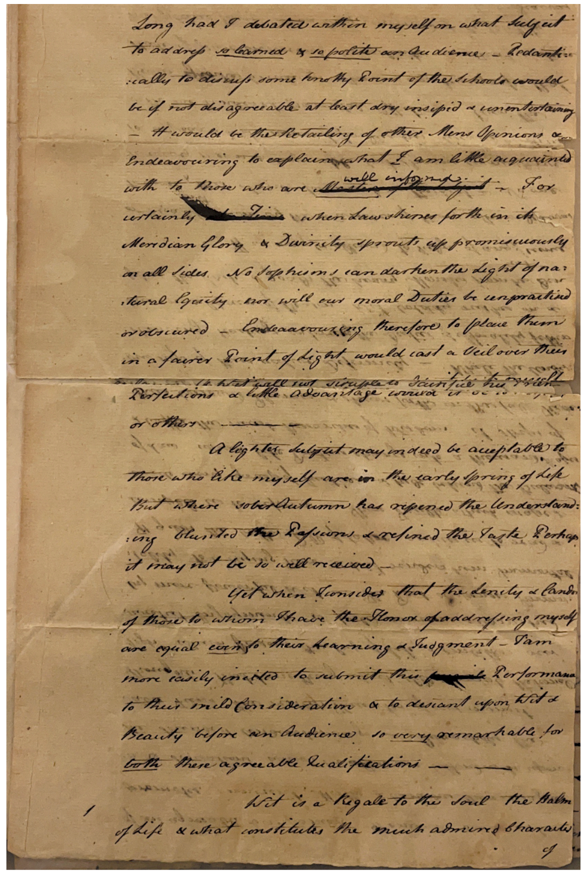
[3]Columbia University, “C250 Celebrates Columbians Ahead of their Time: Gouverneur Morris,” 2004.

Born in 1752, Morris enrolled at King's College at the young age of 12 (two months shy of 13) and graduated in 1768 at age 16, then continuing on to get a Masters degree in 1771. He was even young by the standards of the 1760s as he was the youngest student at King's, about 3 years off the average age. For reference, his fellow alumnus and to-be political ally John Jay, seven years Morris' senior, was 15 when he was admitted at the college.[4] Morris' first year was exactly a decade after classes first started at the school, so the institution was still small and exclusive, located in downtown New York City. Before King's, Morris received a top-notch education at Benjamin Franklin's (also new) preparatory school in Philadelphia, setting him up well for King's. The curriculum of those years followed that of fellow British College, Oxford, in studying the Greek and Roman classics.[5] There was also an Anglican Christian service held every morning that was obligatory for students before they headed to classes. It appears this religious observance was culturally customary in elite British American society, but did not necessarily reflect Morris' complete religious background. There were only seven students in his graduating class, so all the boys took their classes together, growing their knowledge of each other in addition to the world around them.

Morris ranked second in this class of seven and at his 1768 graduation, he delivered an *Oration on Wit and Beauty* to his peers, the first page of which is seen below.[6] He also delivered an *Oration on Love* at the commencement for his legal studies at King's in 1771. But his connection to the school continued well after graduation as he

[4]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, 18.
[5]Ibid., 19.
[6]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 6-14.

became a trustee of the college in 1805, at age 53 and remained one until just over a decade later. His diary notes a good handful of board meetings throughout, primarily, the 1810s, but it does not note the content of the meetings except in brief reference (i.e. discussed the duties of the president and provost).[7]


Long had I debated within myself on what Subject to address so learned & so polite an Audience – Pedanti:cally to discuss some knotty Point of the Schools would be if not disagreeable at least dry insipid & unentertaining – It would be the Retailing of other Mens Opinions & Endeavouring to explain what I am little acquainted with to those who are well informed – For certainly [illegible] when Law shines forth in its Meridian Glory & Divinity sprouts up promiscuously on all Sides. No Sophisms can darken the Light of na:tural Equity nor will our moral Duties be unpractised or obscured – Endeavouring therefore to place them in a fairer Point of Light would cast a Veil over their [illegible] to what will not scruple to Sacrifice his own Perfections a little Advantage [illegible] or others ——
A lighter Subject may indeed be acceptable to those who like myself are in the early Spring of Life But where sober Autumn has ripened the Understand:ing blunted the Passions & refined the Taste Perhaps it may not be so well received –
Yet when I consider that the Lenity & Candor of those to whom I have the Honor of addressing myself are equal even to their Learning & Judgment – I am more easily invited to submit this Performance to their mild Consideration & to descant upon Wit & Beauty before an Audience so very remarkable for both these agreeable Qualifications — ——
Wit is a Regale to the Soul the Balm of Life & what constitutes the much admired Character of

The oldest remaining document in his own words, 1768 *Oration on Wit and Beauty* is historically significant for its surprising patriotism and budding revolutionary spirit at the graduation of a deeply loyalist institution seven years before the Revolutionary War broke out. About halfway through the speech he refers to his peers as “we who can boast of the glorious title of free-born Americans.”[8] Of course, his peers experienced a relative freedom of life that Morris and his fellow revolutionaries would later capitalize on. They did not, however, experience a lack of freedom at the hands of the British like the enslaved people experienced at the hands of each of their parents, including Gouverneur. After King’s Morris came into his anti-slavery opinion in discussion with his opinions on aristocracy, representation, and morality - he even included a note that a lack of wit assumed that “our moral Duties be unpracticed or obscured” - but he rarely

[7]Miller, Melanie Randolph, ed., *The Diaries of Gouverneur Morris Digital Edition,* University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015, Thursday, 13 [June 1811; Morrisania].
[8]Gouverneur Morris papers, 1768-1816; Columbia University RBML, Box 13, Folder 794, 3.

seemed to make the connection between freedom from the crown and freedom at home.[9]

King's was an institution that integrated with the systems of British New York and revolved around imported slave labor, an international merchant class, and select family clans. The school was designed with the wealthy pro-slavery to-be loyalists in mind. In addition to the classics, students were educated with the values of land-owning capitalists and the neighboring slave market in mind. While the majority of the student body was connected to pro-slavery loyalists, King's did produce anti-slavery John Jay in addition to Morris as well as several other revolutionaries such as Alexander Hamilton. Two generations later, John Jay II more clearly exemplifies a conflict of interest Columbia's values in his abolitionist stance, similarly to Morris' generation that stood out from their class as more critical of the school's intentions. As Foner offhandedly noted, "Jay learned his hatred of slavery at home, not at Columbia," as the grandson of John Jay I.[10] This description of Jay II implies that his anti-slavery attitude was grown in spite of his education at Columbia, not necessarily because of it. The same can be argued for Morris. His anti-slavery opinions presented themselves at home and in office, not in the halls of King's College.

Again, to set the scene for the powerful population connected to King's, prominent family clans such as the Van Cortlandts, Schuylers, Philipses, Livingstons were disproportionately related to the college's governors (operating like present-day board members) and "just fifteen family names [accounted] for nearly a quarter (53 of 226) of all students" so much so that Professors had a difficult time taking notes on

[9]Gouverneur Morris papers, 1768-1816; Columbia University RBML, Box 13, Folder 794, 1.
[10]Foner, Eric; *Columbia and Slavery: A Preliminary Report*, 2016, 37.

students with the same names.[11] Similarly, over 50% of the King's governors made their livings as merchants or landowner-merchants, tying them to the slave market.[12] These statistics describe the incestuous nature of wealth and trade in the King's College community. The aristocrats of 18th century New York were intermarried between clans, owners of land worked by enslaved people, and funders of elite institutions like King's.

Given this exclusivism, Gouverneur was only able to attend King's because of the Morris' standing as a prominent landowning family of New York in the 18th century. Wealth and socio-political reach were requirements for access to formal education and Morris would have been barred from access if he lacked them. Key to his success as a politician was his attendance at an expensive institution that offered no financial aid, and the fact he graduated without loans; "it was his family's financial status and social connections that gave him access to the splendid education."[13]

The Morris family initially gained wealth and bought land a few generations before Gouverneur, immigrating from the merchant-planter class in Barbados, the British-colonized island nation that relied heavily on sugar crops worked by enslaved West Africans. Gouverneur's grandfather Lewis Morris was the so-called "prefounder" of King's College itself as an influential landowner who advocated for a college in New York City.[14] The elder Lewis also financially supported Trinity College, indirectly funding King's and tying the Morris family to King's before Gouverneur was even born.[15]

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[11]McCaughey, Robert; Stand Columbia: a history of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004, Columbia University Press, 2003, 21.
[12]Ibid., 40.
[13]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 27.
[14]McCaughey, Robert; Stand Columbia: a history of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004, Columbia University Press, 2003, 1.
[15]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 6-14.

Gouverneur's father, Lewis Morris Jr., then inherited Morrisania, the large family estate in what is now the South Bronx. Lewis Morris Jr. inherited about 100 slaves, including 64 who operated the family ironworks.[16] The estate was still operated by at least 46 slaves upon his death in 1762, just before Gouverneur enrolled at King's. Sarah Morris (initially Sarah Gouverneur, from whose surname became her son's first name) also inherited slaves for personal use.[17] This marked the Morrises as likely the largest single slave holding in New York at the time and positioned the Morris family next to the aforementioned merchant-landowner clans, all of whom owned slaves, based their profits in the slave market, and founded Columbia's endowment. The children of these families (many with repeated names due to the intermarrying of clans) became Morris' peers at King's and his fellow trustees in the 19th century.

Although Morris was the last-born son and therefore did not inherit any of the Morrisania land upon graduating from King's and entering adulthood, he certainly inherited the aristocratic family status. His high-class upbringing would draw into his political opinions later in life both opposing and evidencing his remarks. Attending and excelling at King's College was certainly part of this inherited status. Morris' experience at King's allowed him to develop complex opinions on the issues of his time, eventually distinguishing himself as anti-slavery. Even though these sentiments were founded outside of King's, as it was an institution very content with slavery's continuation, his abilities for eloquent writing and articulate remarks on the subject were due to his access to formal education. The irony of Morris' enrollment in such an elite institution, afforded to him through these circumstances, is that he grew up to speak favorably

[16]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, 4-12.
[17]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 61-62.

about egalitarianism and unfavorably about aristocracy. This suggests a shame or disgust at his own upbringing and father's lifestyle, although there is no direct evidence confirming his personal opinions of his family in this way. He may have had political differences from them and did not immediately inherit land, but he did continue to manage some of the family wealth through his life, involving himself with merchants, purchasing land upstate, and investing in the Dutch Company that developed land across New York and grew his own wealth. Separately from his takes on egalitarianism and aristocracy, Morris remained an elitist who believed the most-educated should govern.[18] In a certain light, these contrasts in his life and opinions paint Morris as appreciative of his schooling and his investment in effectively governing the country with money and education. A more negative light reveals a lack of critical awareness of his privilege and an insidious investment in his own kind.

On the Political Stage

After graduating from King's, Gouverneur began to make his mark in history as an anti-slavery advocate, first at the 1777 New York Constitutional Convention. There, with the support of his abolitionist friend and King's College alumnus John Jay, he petitioned for a gradual abolition clause to be added to the constitution. The clause would have freed enslaved people after a certain amount of years or generations in bondage, but Morris and Jay failed to make it a reality in the final draft of the state constitution. In a rare instance of using the emotionally-rooted concept of freedom - as was alluded to in this essay's discussion of his *Oration on Wit and Beauty* - Morris advocated for this failed clause "so that in future ages, every human being who

[18]Ibid., 6-14.

breathes the air of this state, shall enjoy the privileges of a Freeman."[19] It is not clear that Morris made this connection before war broke out, but in this quote he seems to emphasize the need for freedom across racial lines. Given his lifelong commitment to the upper class though, his perspective on freedom likely meant simply the lack of unpaid bondage (as was standard for the rhetoric of the time). Although 1777 was early in the history of anti-slavery laws and New York eventually sided with the majority of states in continuing to legalize slavery, states such as neighboring Vermont did begin the process of gradual abolition in the late 1770s when New York did not. Over two decades after the New York Constitutional Convention, New York did enact a gradual abolition clause that freed enslaved mothers and daughters within the next 28 years and enslaved sons only after 28 years so that abolition was enacted in the state officially in 1827. Morris died in 1816 and never bore witness to the realization of the gradual abolition system he advocated for at the 1777 Convention. Of course, he also never bore witness to the end of slavery on the national scale; the southern delegates he clashed with in 1787 held political and economic power through the Civil War, almost 40 years after his death.Regardless of Morris' surrender on the slavery question, co-drafting the NY State Constitution launched his political career towards the national stage, coming to a head at the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Morris is most obviously known on the national stage for his partial responsibility in drafting the final language of the United States Constitution as well as his endorsement of the famous "We The People" introduction to the document's Preamble. At the 1787 Constitutional Convention, the main issue Morris spoke on was the ⅗ clause that proposed slaves would count not as purely inhuman but instead as worth ⅗ of a

[19]Foner, Eric; *Columbia and Slavery: A Preliminary Report*, 2016.

white man for the purposes of allocating state representation in the national government. Morris opposed the clause largely because it would group power in the southern states highly populated with enslaved people, which, in turn, decreased his own power. Of course, it also gave the enslavers he worked with in Congress disproportionate representation. Here, he claimed to oppose slavery largely out of moral reasons, falling in line with his documented writings on the topics of man's emotions and humanity under God. Similarly, he cited a frustration with aristocracy itself; "slavery to him symbolized the most egregious aspects of aristocracy, which granted privileges irrespective of talent."[20] He also called it "the most prominent feature in the aristocratic countenance of the proposed constitution" at the convention.[21] This pair of quotes represented his distaste for governance by those he deemed uneducated (bringing to light his elitism) as well as his conflict with his father's agrarian methods of holding socio-economic power. Because he himself experienced the privileges of aristocracy, the irony of his distaste for it and its consequential production of domestic slavery often boiled down to disagreements with his father's way of life as previously mentioned.

At the convention itself, on August 8th, Morris is famously quoted as asking his fellow delegates to consider the illogical nature of ⅗ of an enslaved person presented in this manner: "Are they men? Then make them Citizens & let them vote. Are they property? Why, then, is no other property included?"[22] In a similar vein, appealing to the emotions of the delegates on the topic of the slave trade and representation, he

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[20]Gellman, David N; Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom 1777-1827, Louisiana State University Press, 2006, 33-34.
[21]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 174-180.
[22]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, 158-163; Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 174-180.

expressed frustration “that the inhabitant of Georgia and S. C. who goes to the coast of Africa, and in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tears away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections and damns them to the most cruel bondages, shall have more votes in a government instituted for the protection of the rights of mankind than the citizens of Pa. or N. J.”[23] Unfortunately, neither his appeals to the hearts of the delegates nor his King’s College literary eloquence persuaded his coworkers in governance; the importation of slaves was outlawed in 1808 and the Emancipation Proclamation was passed in 1863.

Although Morris made a name for himself in the history books as “The most outspoken critic of slavery among the Columbia-connected delegates” at this very convention, he buried his frustrations to facilitate the adoption of a final draft and give in to convenience after months of deliberation. In remembering Morris’ honorable attempts to change the minds of his peers, it seems Morris could not have been expected to continue standing up to his fellow delegates on this sole issue when the entire Constitution was at stake. It seems he could not have been expected to hold his ground or sabotage the final debates when such a stance would certainly inconvenience him out of future political office. At the convention, Morris proved himself to be radical with his spoken words (at least in comparison to his fellow delegates), but not with his written ones; this draft of the Constitution that he himself helped write and edit infamously included the ⅗ clause and never mentioned the word *slavery*. Arguably the most damning aspect of his failure at both the 1777 and 1787 convention was not necessarily his inability to persuade his pro-slavery peers into removing the ⅗ clause and supporting gradual abolition, but his complete abandonement of his anti-slavery words when it was

[23]Foner, Eric; *Columbia and Slavery: A Preliminary Report*, 2016.

time to draft the final documents.

Another distinction in Morris' recorded stance on slavery is that he never publicly advocated for immediate abolition while in office. This hesitation could have been simply a product of the pressure he felt from pro-slavery representatives or a product of his views on slavery itself. In the words of David Gellman, he "may have imagined abolition as a gift to his state over time, a token not of radical egalitarianism…"[24] Morris is not remembered as an abolitionist, but an anti-slavery advocate, the difference in language primarily noting his interest in a phase out of the system, rather than an abrupt end. Gradual abolition appeased the wider interests of more men, namely the interest of private property (for which slaves and the land they worked were the main proponent of.) The U.S. has long prioritized private property over egalitarian society and Morris' vocalized aspirations for gradual abolition did not break this trend. He chose not to threaten private property in the way that immediate abolition would have. This distinction afforded Morris and other anti-slavery sympathizers to hold a moral stance against their contemporaries without truly threatening any of their financial interests.

His public position on domestic slavery being established, the degree to which he was responsible for the final draft of the state and national constitutions is unclear as he was assumedly under great pressure to edit with the interests of many powerful characters in mind. It is impossible to fairly judge a man's actions from 250 years ago with present-day values of abolition and anti-racism as he, like every person, was a product of his time and accustomed to the society he was born into. In a note from James Kirschke's biography, "That Gouverneur gave way on the slavery issue is to be

[24]Gellman, David N; Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom 1777-1827, Louisiana State University Press, 2006, 33-34.

regretted, but even large historical actors must shape their actions within their contexts."[25] However, the reader must wonder what would have happened if someone else more personally invested in abolition (i.e. an enslaved person) was fantastically placed in Morris' congressional position. Would they be dismissed and blacklisted like Morris likely feared would happen to own career in addition to being unsuccessful on the issue of slavery? Without hypothesizing too much, the question here is how influential Morris truly was in the national convention. If he had acted differently, would he have sabotaged his livelihood or could he have been successful in blocking the ⅗ clause from being enacted? Again, it is impossible to fairly hold a historical character such as Morris to the standards of what contemporary people would like to do if they traveled back in time. The hypothetical doesn't answer any questions about Morris' moral standing or historical value, but it does probe the historical circumstances Morris was involved in that produced another 80 years of unrectifiable chattel slavery.

Over a decade later, as Morris was settling down and leaving his short-lived Senator's office in 1803, he made one final public aim at blocking the expansion of slavery in what would become the land of the Louisiana Purchase, concerning himself with the burning question of expansion into the western territories.[26] Morris did not appear to take a public stance on the American relationship to the Indigenous people who occupied the western territory, but he was opposed to allowing slave state representation to expand. Of course, abolition would not come to this territory in its entirety until after the Civil War.

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[25]Kirschke, James J; *Gouverneur Morris: Author, statesman, and man of the world*, St. Martin's Press, 2005, 297n87.
[26]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003.

Labor at Home

In Morris' application of his anti-slavery opinions, he did not hold slaves at Morrisania or on his travels, unlike his family members. As per his will, his father Lewis Morris Jr. left one slave to his son with another to be left upon his mother's death.[27] In the case of the first person, Morris manumitted him against his father's wishes. Morris was a founding member of the New York Manumission Society alongside John Jay. Many members, such as John Jay, of the NY Manumission Society owned slaves while a part of the society, explained their hypocrisy with a promise to free their purchased slaves later, after serving their duties.[28] As for the second person, accrued in 1786, there is no record of Morris ever owning slaves so it can be assumed that they were manumitted too and Morris remained steadfast in his anti-slavery stance at home and on the Convention floor.

This fact is not to suggest that Morris was not waited on. He kept an arsenal of paid servants at his disposal to do his cooking and cleaning, run his carriages, and keep the grounds of Morrisania in the absence of his father's enslaved labor force. As per his diary writings, many of the servants were Black and referred to just by their race or position and infrequently by their name. For the case of the servants and slaves of his friends, he referred to them as the property of their "Master" such as "Mr. Ludlow's lazy Negro," an entry that referred to a free coachman but still used "Master" to describe Mr. Ludlow.[29] He would also refer to the unnamed servants with possessive pronouns such as "my Negro Boy."[30] There is also a large section of his diary's index dedicated to

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[27]Gellman, David N; Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom 1777-1827, Louisiana State University Press, 2006, 33-34.
[28]Foner, Eric; *Columbia and Slavery: A Preliminary Report*, 2016.
[29]Miller, Melanie Randolph, ed., *The Diaries of Gouverneur Morris Digital Edition,* University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015, Sunday 2d March [1800; en route to Morrisania].
[30]Ibid., Sunday 8 March [1801; departure from Washington; en route to Morrisania]

"unidentified workers: black servants" referring to entries where the servant's race often is even specified, but can be assumed because of their position. Within the lifetimes of the laborers, using their names would have proved Morris' capability for granting a level of respect and decency to his staff, recognizing their identities beyond race and class. 250 years later, the general researcher, as well as any descendants of these laborers, would have benefited greatly from recorded names of each person so they could trace lifetimes and family lines. A lack of names in Morris' diary is regarded now as dehumanizing and a form of historical erasure. This rhetoric also treats many of his servants as disposable property, drawing an easy comparison to the nature of enslaved workers.

Although Morris did pay each member of his staff, he was not necessarily a benevolent employer, firing some of his servants or leading them to quit. He hired farm hands at $8 or $9 and house staff such as a cook at $16 per month. Some were hired at an annual rate, such as in the case of a live-in working family: "Benj^{n}. Lumby with his Wife and Child… are to have $180 per Annum."[31] He fired many of the servants for cases of disobedience or a refusal to complete undesirable tasks. For example, "I have taken John Bays—at $14 p^{r}. Mo: in Place of Dominique who found it beneath his Dignity to go behind the Carriage" and "[I] discharge my Servant W^{m} Wells who declined going behind by my Carriage, wherefore I am in Town without a Servant."[32] He seemed to seize power over servants via his firing power such as in the following example: "we are oblig'd to return for Articles which the Negligence of Servants had left behind. The Reproof on this Occasion leads my Valet de Chambr[e] to express an earnest Wish that

[31]Ibid., Wednesday 22^{d} [November 1809; Morrisania]
[32]Ibid., Wednesday 7 [March 1810; New York], Tuesday 4 [April 1809; Morrisania and New York]

he may be discharged which I gladly promise" to which he admitted in a later entry confirming his firing of the valet that this was "A promise he wishes me to break."[33] A final example of his firing came down to the personality of a servant: "My Coachman overturned Yesterday M^{r}. d'orléans Chair so I must dismiss him especially as he was quarrelsome."[34] In this last diary entry, the word "dismiss" holds an ironic double meaning as it can be assumed that the coachman was disrespected by Mr. D'Orléans but held no power to speak against his mistreatment other than to become physically disorderly.

When he traveled, Morris came with two servants who accompanied him in his sleeping accommodations, regardless of their state of health, in an example of servants kept on duty while ill.[35] Although these accompanying servants did not quit over their poor conditions, others did. For example, Morris expressed inconvenience by the decision of "a Boy, the only Domestic we had, left is gone off and we have now to keep House with Persons hired by the Day."[36] There is another account of someone escaping Morrisania: "This Morning return Home and bring with me a new Servant, my Man Bill having run away—I am to give him $11 p^{r}M^{o}."[37] His entries of escapees certainly parallels runaway slaves down to Morris' perspective of being unjustly inconvenienced by the expression of his servants and an unwillingness to address the conditions from which the servants were compelled to quit.

In another parallel, the diary references the direct sale of people. The circumstances of the sale are unclear, but it's possible Morris purchased slaves and

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[33]Ibid., Wednesday 14 Sep^{r}. [1803; travel through upstate New York], Tuesday 22^{d} Nov^{r}. [1803; Morrisania].
[34]Ibid., Tuesday 20 Aug^{t}. [1799; Morrisania].
[35]Ibid., Thursday 11 Sep^{r}. [1806; excursion to New Jersey].
[36]Ibid., Saturday 11 [June 1814; Morrisania].
[37]Ibid., Monday 10 March [1806; New York and Morrisania].

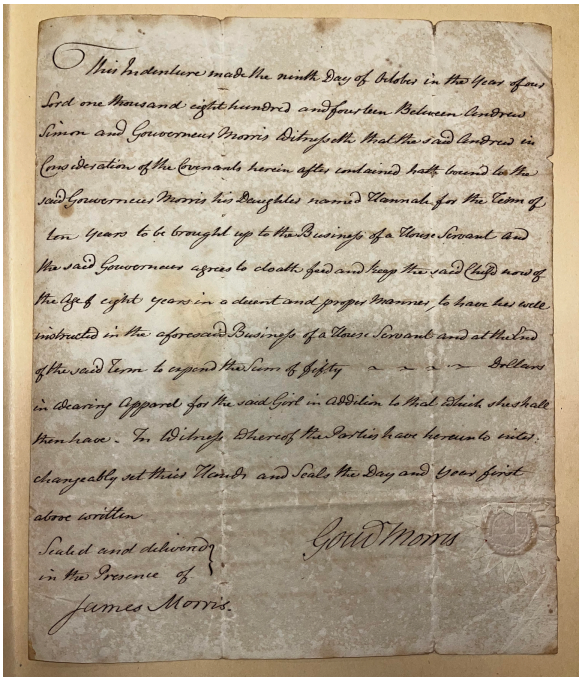
manumitted them in order to have them work for him as freedmen. Two references to sale stand out in the diary: "Mr. Leacraft comes—Purchase a Negro of him," and "James Morris [no relation] was with me Yesterday he sells me a Negro for Eighty Pounds and promises to take away a Wench which has improperly been saddled upon me."[38] The latter is especially concerning because of his description of the woman he traded off his estate. She, unsurprisingly, was not named or identified by any qualities save for incompetence. His dismissive language in regards to the woman being saddled on him against his will suggests that she could have been a slave left from his parent's estate that he decided to pass off to a colleague. Similarly, his language suggests he does not care for James' plans for her.

Morris' diary entries are brief and mostly catalog the weather and his travels, all in the later half of his life after he returned from Europe in the later 18th century. As a full-fledged adult at that point, Morris revealed himself to rely on a large fleet of servants who took care of his every need so he could meet with political colleagues and Columbia trustees. Just as he was afforded the time and funds of a top education at King's in his youth, he was afforded much passive thinking and leisure time at the hands of his servants in his adulthood.

A final example of Morris' slavery-adjacent labor practices at home comes from a record of indentured servitude in his Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) collection rather than his diary. Indentured servitude required money to be paid to the parent of a child servant or to the servant at the end of their service, rather than on a regular basis to the servant themself. Towards the end of his life, he contracted an eight-year-old girl, Hannah Simon, into indentured servitude for the purposes of caring

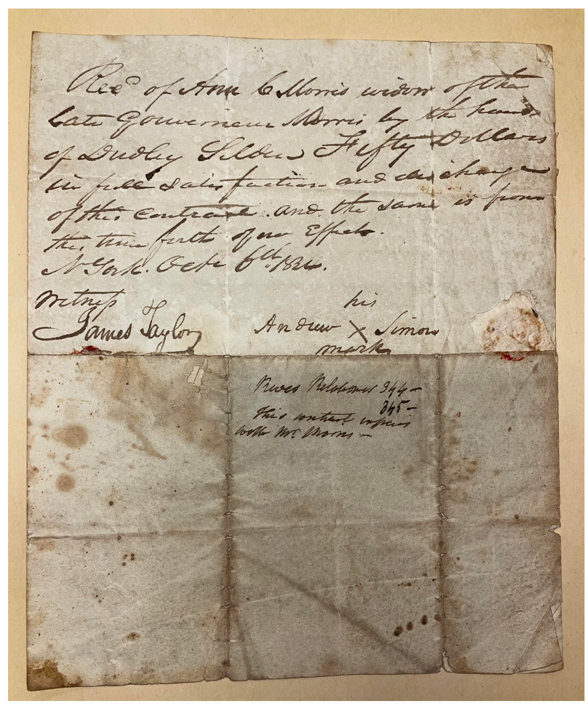
[38]Ibid., Tuesday 14 June [1803; Morrisania], Monday 4 March [1799; Morrisania].

for his wife, Ann Cary Randolph Morris. Ann grew up on a Virginia plantation and was likely accustomed to a high standard of living that did not require labor from her, especially in her husband's absence. The first document of two, produced in 1814, is shown to the right. It reads "This Indenture made the ninth Day of October in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fourteen Between Andrew Simon and Gouverneur Morris, Witnesseth that the said Andrew in Consideration of the Covenants herein after contained, hath bound to the said Gouverneur Morris his Daughter named Hannah for the term of ten years to be brought up to the Blessings of a House Servant and the said Gouverneur agrees to cloath, feed, and keep the said Child, now of the age of eight years, in a decent and proper manner, to have her well instructed in the aforesaid Blessings of a House Servant and at the End of the said Term to expand the sum of fifty —- Dollars in wearing apparel for the said Girl in addition to that which she shall then have. In Witness whereof the Parties have herein to nite: changeably set their Hands and Seals the Day and Year first above written."[39] The full text of the document is valuable to read because it describes a standardized procedure where a child was committed to labor at the hands of an elderly, rich man when her family was backed into a financial corner. The document is signed of course by Gouverneur Morris as well as James Morris, the same man Gouverneur sold and traded workers with as recorded in


This Indenture made the ninth Day of October in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fourteen Between Andrew Simon and Gouverneur Morris Witnesseth that the said Andrew in Consideration of the Covenants herein after contained hath bound to the said Gouverneur Morris his Daughter named Hannah for the Term of ten Years to be brought up to the Business of a House Servant and the said Gouverneur agrees to cloath feed and keep the said Child now of the Age of eight years in a decent and proper Manner to have her well instructed in the aforesaid Business of a House Servant and at the End of the said Term to expend the Sum of fifty — — — — Dollars in wearing Apparel for the said Girl in addition to that which she shall then have. In Witness whereof the Parties have herein to nite: changeably set their Hands and Seals the Day and Year first above written
Sealed and delivered in the Presence of
James Morris
Gouv Morris

[39]Gouverneur Morris papers, 1768-1816; Columbia University RBML, Box 14, Folder 868.

his diary, suggesting a mutually benefiting relationship between the two revolving around exploitative labor practices. Hannah's father Andrew Simon never signed the document and, as is apparent in the next document, he was likely illiterate and both Simons were unable to read the contract on Hannah's behalf. From this first document, it appears that the Simons' purposes for entering into the contract were not even for the reward of payment, but for the physical care of Hannah in return for her labor in order to relieve her parent(s) of her financial burden as a girl. Although the Morrises agreed to meet her physical needs, this document presents a clear example of a work contract and not that of foster care. There is no record of a parental nature in the relationship between Gouverneur of Ann and Hannah and there is no doubt that she worked for her clothes and food in the house and was legally unable to leave the Morrises.


Recd of Ann C Morris widow of the
late Gouverneur Morris by the hands
of Dudley Selden Fifty Dollars
in full satisfaction and discharge
of this contract and the same is from
the [illegible] forth of our Effects.
N York. Octr 6th 1824.
Witness
James Taylor
his
Andrew X Simon
mark
[illegible] 344–
345–
This contract [illegible]
with Mr. Morris –

The second document proves the completion of the indenture contract, shown to the right.[40] Written in 1824 by James Taylor in Gouverneur Morris' absence, it confirmed that $50 in clothing goods was granted to Hannah. Her mark is never included, as would not have been customary for any woman, but her father's signature is not properly included either. He marked his name with an "X," denoting that Andrew Simon was illiterate. This, in addition to the existence of the contract in the first place, further evidenced that the Simons were of a low economic class without access to education. Unfortunately,

[40]Gouverneur Morris papers, 1768-1816; Columbia University RBML, Box 14, Folder 868.

Hannah likely never accessed schooling either as the only instruction the Morrises promised was that in how to be a house servant.

Indenture is not slavery, but this contract does speak to the Morris family's continued wealth and ability to exploit members of the lower class. It also demonstrates examples of exploitative labor circumstances outside of slavery that the Morrises took part in. Hannah Simon's indenture, in addition to the legion of servants Morris contracted, complicates the characterization of Morris as "consciously self-denying," as McCaughey describes his revolutionary nature.[41] In many ways, Morris was also a product of his time, where indentured servitude and a full staff were common labor practices and would have been a logical choice for a wealthy couple, especially in older age. As a side note, Ann was 22 years Gouverneur's junior so he was comparatively in a much more senior state than she and anticipated widowing her. Gouverneur built a public reputation for himself as morally opposed to slavery, but was very comfortable with exploitative contracts. If Morris is to be judged with the modern eye as ahead of his time in regards to slavery, he must also be judged as exemplary of his time in regards to paid and indentured servitude.

In Remembrance

In his *Oration on Wit & Beauty* upon graduating from King's College, Morris wrote that "Wit renders [a dying hero] immortal."[42] And immortality he was granted. As a member of aristocratic society, a revolutionary founding father, an anti-slavery advocate, and an alumnus of Columbia University, Morris has been memorialized for over 200

[41]McCaughey, Robert; Stand Columbia: a history of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004, Columbia University Press, 2003, 47.
[42]Gouverneur Morris papers, 1768-1816; Columbia University RBML, Box 13, Folder 794, 1.

years. Although his alma mater didn't celebrate his 250th birthday in 2002, they did two years later as part of Columbia's 250th birthday.[43] On a 2004 website titled "Columbians Ahead of Their Time," Morris was immortalized as an American revolutionary who, alongside his brother, "sided with the revolutionaries even as their mother and sisters remained loyal to the crown."[44] William Adams used this terminology, "far ahead of his time" in his 2003 biography as well.[45] The paragraph-long Columbia website biography is sanitized of the fact that in order to defy his loyalist mother and sisters, he also defied that deeply loyalist college itself. It is brief, but the bio surprisingly includes no mention of his relationship with slavery, either in a positive or negative light. This absence falls in light with Columbia's overall silence on its history with slavery. While peer institutions have issued obligingly self-critical formal reports on their history, the first of which being published three years before the "Columbians Ahead of Their Time" project from Yale University. Still, Columbia has not produced a formal report at the same caliber as fellow Ivy League schools and did not begin the Columbia & Slavery project until over a decade after Yale's report. The school's administration has historically been hesitant to acknowledge its founding in the slave economy and tends to shield prospective students from the full story of its founders, endowment, and building names. It is possible, then, to interpret that lack of mention on Morris' page as a bypass of the entire issue. Mentioning his anti-slavery contributions would have allowed the reader to question just who Morris was opposed to, the answer of course including many of the King's College students and trustees. It is also possible the project was simply too

[43]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, xvi.
[44]Columbia University, "C250 Celebrates Columbians Ahead of their Time: Gouverneur Morris," 2004.
[45]Adams, William H, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, 88.

small-scale and only Morris' documented successes could be included. This returns, however, to the danger of oversimplifying a biography.

The Yale report includes an explanation of the paper's purpose, relating to the danger of oversimplification:

> Where members of the Yale community have joined in the struggle against slavery, their contributions should be celebrated. At the same time, we must acknowledge the degree to which this same institution and community has been complicit in the institution of slavery. This process of critical inquiry and self-examination is what universities should be all about. In researching and writing this essay, we intend to provide a model of what it means to struggle with our past to build a better future.[46]

And a model they did provide. Gouverneur Morris had an occasionally contradictory relationship with slavery and labor throughout his life, and understanding his Morrisania upbringing and King's education help explain his actions. It is worth bringing to light Morris' anti-slavery advocacy as well as his complicated biography in order to celebrate and critique him like that Yale report does for the University.

In order to hold anti-slavery opinions in his political identity, Gouverneur Morris opposed the opinions of his family members as well as his peers in the major trustee families of Columbia. A full biography of him as a King's graduate challenges the image of the College as a school capable of producing such an anti-slavery advocate, but rather Morris as an exception to the rule in this regard. In terms of his personal intentions, he held God close and wished for an egalitarian counterbalance to aristocracy and its favorite child, slavery. This biography illuminates how Morris was both representative of and revolutionary in comparison to King's College. Likewise, it tells of Morris as a man who played a role in constitutional decision-making due to

[46]Fueser, J. J.; Celso de Castro Alves, J.; Dugdale, Antony, "Yale, Slavery, and Abolition," The Amistad Committee, Inc. 2001, 30.

predictable circumstances and still made honorable efforts to oppose slavery. But Morris was not “self-denying” as we understand in retrospect.[47] He may have disliked the land-based aristocracy he saw his father as a part of, but he never sacrificed his luxurious way of life to maintain his lifestyle without relying on Black servants for personal care. This being said, he committed to the New York Manumission Society and did not own slaves, directly defying the will of his father. In this stance, he also defied his peers at King’s College, his fellow trustees on the Board, and his political colleagues at the Constitutional Conventions and in Congress. While it may be ineffective to compare Morris to a hypothetical abolitionist, it is possible to compare him to his contemporaries at the aforementioned institutions who grasped onto slavery and the wealth it afforded them much longer than Morris. This quality made him not truly just a “Columbian Ahead of [His] Time,” but a Columbian ahead of Columbia as well, a fact regarding the Columbia connection to slavery that the present-day University has yet to acknowledge in full.

[47]McCaughey, Robert; Stand Columbia: a history of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004, Columbia University Press, 2003, 47.

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