

COLUMBIA AND SLAVERY: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Drawing on papers written by students in a seminar I directed in the spring of 2015 and another directed by Thai Jones in the spring of 2016, all of which will soon be posted in a new website, as well as my own research and relevant secondary sources, this report summarizes Columbia's connections with slavery and with antislavery movements from the founding of King's College to the end of the Civil War. Significant gaps remain in our knowledge, and investigations into the subject, as well as into the racial history of the university after 1865, will continue.

1. King's College and Slavery

The fifth college founded in Britain's North American colonies, King's College, Columbia's direct predecessor, opened its doors in July 1754 on a beautiful site in downtown New York City with a view of New York harbor, New Jersey, and Long Island. Not far away, at Wall and Pearl Streets, stood the municipal slave market. But more than geographic proximity linked King's with slavery. One small indication of the connection appeared in the May 12, 1755 issue of the New-York Post-Boy or Weekly Gazette. The newspaper published an account of the swearing-in ceremony for the college governors, who took oaths of allegiance to the crown administered by Daniel Horsmanden, a justice of the colony's Supreme Court. The same page carried an advertisement for the sale of "two likely Negro Boys and a Girl," at a shop opposite Beekman's Slip, a wharf at present-day Fulton Street. Horsmanden, who had presided over the sensational trials of alleged slave conspirators in 1741, was a college governor by virtue of his judicial position. The Beekman family was among the wealthiest members of New York's mercantile elite. Although they conducted most of their commerce with Great Britain, they owned slaves and occasionally traded them. Henry Beekman, a slaveowner, was among the governors who took the oath in 1755. Gerard Beekman, a King's graduate in 1766, owned nine slaves in 1790. Nine Beekmans attended King's and Columbia between 1766 and 1889.¹

From the outset, slavery was intertwined with the life of the college. Of the ten men who served as presidents of King's and Columbia between 1754 and the end of the Civil War, at least half owned slaves at one point in their lives. So did the first four treasurers. Samuel Johnson, an Anglican minister and King's' first president, serving from 1754 to 1763, was a well-known theologian and philosopher. In Elementa Philosophica, published in 1752, Johnson described slavery as "a most wretched and abject condition," but like many other writers of the era he used the word metaphorically, to describe succumbing to "any vicious habit," such as drink or irreligion. As to actually existing slavery, Johnson criticized the Atlantic slave trade but bought and sold slaves, who worked in his household. In July 1755, soon after the College opened, and already the owner of one slave, Johnson asked Joseph Haynes, a leading New York merchant and one of King's College's governors, to help him acquire another. It is unclear whether the transaction took place; that November, Johnson was still hoping to purchase a domestic slave. Since President Johnson lived in the college building, it is likely that his slaves were also present. While president of King's, Johnson helped his son, William Samuel Johnson, who would later serve as Columbia's president from 1787 to 1800, to purchase his own "wench," as female slaves were commonly called. In 1767, four years after leaving office, Johnson sold a slave, Jenny, and took another "wench upon trial." His family "did not like her," so Johnson settled on another slave, Robin, who "does with the best good will twice the kitchen work Jenny did."²

That slavery, from the outset, was a significant feature of the life of King's College should not occasion surprise. King's and Columbia have always been powerfully affected by the city around them and slavery had been a presence since the earliest settlement of New Amsterdam. In the eighteenth century, New York, became an important trading center in Britain's slave-based New World empire and the city's unfree population steadily expanded. No social stigma attached to the buying and selling of slaves. Slave auctions took place at many venues in the city, including wharves owned by major merchants, who imported entire shipments from the Caribbean and, beginning in the 1740s, directly from Africa. Lesser traders imported small numbers of slaves along with other goods. Advertisements for the sale of slaves and seeking the capture of slaves who had run away appeared regularly in the city's newspapers. The export of foodstuffs, livestock, and lumber to the West Indies via New York City and the import and sale of goods produced by slaves in the Caribbean, notably sugar, rum, and molasses, formed the "linchpin" of the colony's mercantile economy.³

On the eve of the War of Independence, nearly 3,000 of the city's population of 19,000 consisted of slaves and some 20,000 slaves lived within fifty miles of Manhattan island, the largest concentration of unfree laborers north of the Mason-Dixon line. Ownership of slaves was widespread. Most worked as domestic laborers, on the docks, in artisan shops, or on small farms in the city's rural hinterland. At the apex of provincial society stood families like the Van Cortlandts, Schuylers, Philippses, and Livingstons, who made fortunes in trade and owned great estates in the Hudson River valley where both

slave and free labor worked in the fields, mills, and in river commerce. This wealthy elite intermarried, featured prominently in municipal and provincial government, and played a major role in the founding and survival of King's College.⁴

From the beginning, as the careful research of Craig S. Wilder has shown, King's was a "merchants' college." Over half the 59 persons who served as governors of King's were merchants, many of them also landowners. Around 90 of the 226 students who attended King's before the Revolution were the sons of merchants, more than at any other college in British North America. The students also included sons of shopkeepers, ship captains, and artisans, but most, in the words of one faculty member, were "the sons of gentlemen of independent fortunes." And prominent New Yorkers, much of whose wealth derived either from slave trading or from commerce in goods produced by slaves, gave crucial financial support. Their influence seeped into the curriculum. One problem assigned by Robert Harpur, Professor of Mathematics in the 1760s, asked students to calculate the profits of three investors in a slave trading voyage "to Guinea."⁵

Since the college building could only accommodate a handful of students, most lived at home or in rented accommodations near King's. An exception was George Washington's stepson John Custis, whom the general brought to New York to enroll at the college in May 1773. Washington chose King's because young Custis had been spoiled by his mother, Martha, and lacked self-discipline; he would not devote himself to his studies at William and Mary, the Virginia college where the sons of the colony's rich gentry often engaged in gambling and womanizing with little fear of punishment.

Washington also wanted to create some distance between Custis and Nellie Calvert, with whom his stepson had fallen in love. Accompanying Custis was a slave, Joe. Unlike Samuel Johnson, Myles Cooper, who had assumed the presidency of King's in 1763, did not own slaves, preferring to employ white indentured servants. (One absconded in 1764, taking with him, according to a notice Cooper placed in the press, a forged document so that "he might pass for a free man," along with silver and gold coins, clothing with the president's initials, and "two silver buckles.") Cooper indulged Custis, setting him up in a suite of rooms and, as Custis wrote home, establishing a "distinction ... between me and the other students." Joe lived in one of the rooms and prepared breakfast each morning; in the evenings Custis dined with Cooper and the professors. Custis also kept a horse at college and went for rides in the countryside twice a week. He did not last long at King's. By September 1773, against Washington's wishes but with the approval of his mother, he returned home to marry. In four months at King's he had managed to spend 300 pounds. There is no record as to whether any of the other students who lived at King's brought slaves to attend to them. Those who lived at home, however, grew up in households where domestic slavery was common, so they were well-acquainted with the institution.⁶

2. Where the Money Came From

King's was the richest colonial college; its endowment, derived from province-sponsored lotteries, grants of land from New York's government, and philanthropic gifts

from its governors and others, reached 17,000 pounds on the eve of the Revolution, almost equal to that of all the other colonial colleges combined. Yet because of the cost of constructing and maintaining the college building, King's found itself in constant need of operating funds and it launched numerous fund-raising campaigns, including a number in the West Indies. Many prominent New York merchants not only had business contacts in the Caribbean but owned property there and sent members of their families to live and handle their affairs. Few donations were forthcoming. Of course, those that were came from slaveowners.⁷

Most of King's money came from New York. The College netted over 8,000 pounds from a bequest in the will of Joseph Murray, a well-connected, childless New York lawyer who served as a King's governor from 1754 until his death in 1757. This was the largest single philanthropic gift in colonial America. Murray had acted as assistant prosecutor during the 1741 "slave plot" trials. He obtained convictions for two of his own slaves, Jack and Adam, the former of whom admitted that he planned to kill Murray and his family. Both were "transported" out of New York as punishment. These events may have made Murray think in new ways about the institution of slavery. In the will that gave his estate to King's, he also freed two slaves and provided an annual stipend of 20 pounds for their support. Freeing slaves in a will was highly unusual in colonial New York.⁸

Merchants, including "the wealthiest and most important men of their time" considerably outnumbered lawyers, ministers, and others on the board of governors.

They donated generously to the College. The initial list of 66 “subscribers,” who donated a total of over 5,000 pounds to help launch King’s, included Atlantic slave traders John Watts, Nathaniel Marston, Adoniah Schuyler, and John Cruger, and many others engaged in commerce with the Caribbean. Apart from Governor Charles Hardy, who gave 500 pounds, the largest contribution, 200, came from Marston, one of the city’s merchants most actively involved in the slave trade from Africa. Most of the donors had a connection to slavery either via ownership or trade.⁹

If King’s profited from its mercantile connections, some of the governors personally benefitted from their relationship to King’s. Augustus Van Horne, whose ancestors had accumulated wealth via the slave trade and who himself owned slaves (one of whom, Caesar, ran away in April 1786), became treasurer of King’s in 1779. At the request of the board of governors, he conducted an audit of the college accounts and discovered that a number of governors and graduates, as well as other prominent New Yorkers, some with no connection at all to the college, for years had used the King’s endowment as a source of credit, borrowing funds at below-market interest rates. The governors on the list included Leonard Lispenard, Van Horne’s predecessor as treasurer of King’s and a member of a prominent slaveowning merchant family; the previously mentioned Justice Hormanden; James Delancey, a slaveholding lawyer; and Henry Cuyler, a 1762 graduate who inherited his father’s sugar refining business and as late as 1800 owned four slaves. Access to credit was a persistent problem for merchants and

others in late colonial New York. King's' endowment helped to subsidize the mercantile and other business activities of men who profited from slavery.¹⁰

3. The Livingstons

The depth of the connections of King's families with slavery can be appreciated by looking at a few prominent examples. The wealth of the Livingston family dated back to the seventeenth century, when Robert Livingston married a wealthy widow, Alida Schuyler, and proceeded to acquire a grant of 160,000 acres of land near the village of Hudson from New York's governor. Livingston invested heavily in the fur trade as well as mercantile voyages between Africa, the Caribbean, and North America involving sugar, tobacco, and slaves. After his death in 1728, his six children expanded the family's landholdings (which at their peak reached one million acres) and its involvement in the slave trade. Five of his sons became merchants; one, Philip, sent three of his own sons to live in the West Indies for a time to manage the family's affairs there. Philip Livingston became one of New York's most active slave traders. He invested in at least fifteen slaving voyages, either alone or in partnership with one or two brothers or other merchants. Some involved heavy losses of life at sea. The Wolf, owned by Philip Livingston and two of his sons, spent fourteen months along the coast of West Africa in 1749 and 1750, eventually sailing west with 135 slaves. When it docked in New York

City in May 1751, only 66 remained – the rest had either perished from disease, been killed in an abortive uprising onboard, or been sold at previous stops. Philip Livingston also advertised in the local press seeking the return of runaway slaves; for example, in 1752, a “Negro Man lately imported from Africa.... Cannot speak a word of English, or Dutch, or any other language but that of his native country.” Since the Livingston family displayed a remarkable lack of invention in naming its sons, with the same names recurring from generation to generation, it is sometimes difficult to tell which Livingston owned individual ships. But no fewer than seventeen voyages brought slaves into New York City between 1730 and 1763 on vessels owned in whole or part by members of the Livingston family.¹¹

The extended Livingston clan included major political figures such as Philip Livingston, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Robert R. Livingston, Chancellor of New York State (a major judicial post) after the Revolution. It was closely tied to King’s and, later, Columbia. Six Livingstons attended King’s before the Revolution (although only three remained long enough to graduate) and 32 attended Columbia and P and S before the Civil War. Three served as governors, including John Livingston, Philip’s son, a donor to and active fund-raiser for the college and a borrower of money from its endowment. He imported slaves and West Indian produce into New York City and other colonies and placed dozens of advertisements in newspapers in New York and elsewhere for their sale. One such ad, in a Virginia newspaper, offered for sale “to the highest bidder ... three prime young Negro Fellows, namely, a Bricklayer, a

Tailor, and a Field Negro.” He also advertised for the return of runaway slaves.

Brockholst Livingston, who owned four slaves in 1790 and one in 1800, was treasurer of Columbia from 1784 to 1823 and a trustee (as governors were called at Columbia) for almost all that time. Five other Livingstons at one time or another were trustees. They included Rev. John Henry Livingston, a co-owner of the Friendship plantation in Jamaica, which at its sale in 1784 was home to 207 slaves, and Walter Livingston, part owner of the Aleppo plantation in Jamaica and owner of 20 slaves in New York in 1790, when he was a trustee of Columbia College.¹²

When the first federal census was taken in 1790, the various branches of the Livingston family owned 170 slaves. Robert R. Livingston, who had graduated from King’s in 1765, and his mother, Margaret Beekman Livingston, each owned 15. Robert R. Livingston, however, had more enlightened views regarding African-Americans than many of his white contemporaries. As a member of the state’s Council of Revision in 1785, he helped to veto a bill passed by the legislature that provided for gradual abolition but barred blacks from voting and holding office. Freed slaves, he wrote, could not “be deprived of those essential rights without shocking the principle of equal liberty” fundamental to the New York’s new constitution. “Rendering power permanent and hereditary in the hands of persons who deduce their origins from white ancestors only,” he proclaimed, would lay the foundation for a “malignant ... aristocracy.”¹³

Nonetheless, Robert R. Livingston continued to use slave labor on his vast estate, Clermont, located on the Hudson River a little over one hundred miles north of New

York City. William Strickland, an English visitor who recorded his impressions of the place in 1794, was waited on for breakfast by “four negro boys, the oldest about 11 or 12, barefoot but dressed in livery,” and at dinner was attended by three uniformed adult male slaves. In his will, dated September 1796, Livingston provided for the freedom of all his slaves age thirty or above, or younger “as may be convenient to my dear wife.” He lived until 1813. As late as 1810, the census reported five slaves at Claremont.¹⁴ In addition, Robert R. Livingston and his brother John owned a number of brothels in lower Manhattan in the early nineteenth century, at some of which black women resided, working as either domestic servants or prostitutes.¹⁵

4. Watts, Cruger, and Others

Another major slave owner and slave trader with a close connection to King’s was John Watts, a donor, governor of the college from 1754 to 1776, the father of two King’s students and the grandfather of a third. One of the wealthiest men in the city, Watts imported wine and rum from the West Indies and invested in ships engaged in the Atlantic slave trade. He was the owner, among other vessels, of the Hawk, which sailed from New York to Africa in 1750 and returned with 126 slaves (of an initial cargo of 149). Watts served as the principal agent in New York for a number of West Indian merchants, including Gedney Clarke, a major slave trader operating from Barbados. Watts corresponded with Clarke about the kind of slaves he wished to obtain for sale in New York and other colonies. “For this market,” he wrote Clarke in 1762, “they must be

young the younger the better if not quite children.... Males are best.” To avoid a glut of slaves and falling prices, he continued, “a great many” would be reshipped to Virginia. To circumvent New York’s tax of four pounds for each imported slave, Watts informed Gedney, they could be smuggled in through New Jersey. Watts also bought and sold slaves for prominent acquaintances. In 1763 he lamented to Major-General James Murray, the new British governor of Quebec, that he was unable to obtain “farming men and women” for him, since it was the custom in New York to allow slaves “of any worth or character” to veto a new owner. Slaves, he added, “look upon [Quebec] as an exile from whence they are never to return.”¹⁶

Among Watts’s business partners in slave trading were Henry and John Cruger, owners of one of the major mercantile firms in the Atlantic world. Their account book at the New-York Historical Society records voyages to and from such far-flung places as Jamaica, Madeira, Curacao, Virginia, Amsterdam, Antigua, Bristol, London, and New York. They dealt in flour, sugar, wine, rum, timber, and slaves. The Cruger family is perhaps best known today as patrons of the young Alexander Hamilton. But they were extremely prominent in their own right. John Cruger served as mayor of New York City from 1756 to 1765, and he and Henry were founding governors of the college and fathers of King’s students. Telman Cruger, Henry’s son, attended King’s but did not graduate; he subsequently departed for the West Indies to oversee the family’s operations there and married a local heiress. John Harris Cruger, who managed the family business in Jamaica, became a governor of King’s in 1771. Henry Cruger, Jr., who attended King’s

in 1758 but did not graduate and later donated money to the college, moved to Bristol, a major slave-trading port, to manage the family fortunes there. He was so successful that he was elected as mayor and to Parliament. Meanwhile he invested in ships that carried slaves from Africa to the Caribbean and New York. One, the Nancy, landed 208 slaves in New York in 1770 (of an initial cargo of 250). Another Henry Cruger, who graduated from Columbia in 1796, owned one slave in 1820 – a year when the Census reported only 518 slaves in New York City.¹⁷

Evidence from the records of slaving voyages, runaway ads, wills, and other documents reveals that numerous other King's officials and donors owned slaves and participated in slave trading. William Alexander, the self-styled Lord Sterling, a wealthy merchant and landowner who married the daughter of Philip Livingston, was a donor, fundraiser, and governor of King's. For a time, Alexander was “deeply involved” in the slave trade. He invested in two African slave trading voyages in 1748 and then purchased two slave ships of his own, which brought 100 more slaves to the city. But he soon abandoned the slave trade to concentrate on other enterprises. Edward Antill, a donor and governor of King's and the father of a graduate, inherited slaves from his merchant father. In 1757 he placed an ad in the New York Gazette for the sale of various kind of property, including “Negro men, women, and children, well acquainted with all kinds of husbandry.” In 1757 he donated 800 pounds and a mortgage worth 1,000 to the college to enable talented “children of the poor” to attend King's, since “the children of

the rich were not always of great abilities.” The governors took the money but did not implement Antill’s plan.¹⁸

Other King’s figures involved in slave trading and significant slave ownership included Nathaniel Marston, a governor, donor, and father of two students; William Walton, a governor and donor who invested in some 20 slaving voyages between 1716 and 1740; and Adoniah Schuyler, a donor and member of a major landowning merchant family. When Philip Verplanck, a founding King’s governor and the owner of a Hudson River estate, died in 1771, an inventory of his property listed, along with furniture, books, silverware, and livestock, eight slaves. The Codwise family, four members of which attended Columbia, had a connection with slavery in the Danish West Indies and New York City lasting well into the nineteenth century as merchants, planters, overseers, and ship captains.¹⁹

Numerous runaway ads in New York newspapers (at least forty-four ads submitted by twenty-nine individuals between the classes of 1760 and 1805) also testify to slaveownership by people connected with King’s. Lewis, who had recently been brought from Jamaica, ran away in 1753 from Henry Cuyler, a governor of and borrower from King’s and the owner of a large New York sugar refinery. Lewis, the ad stated, “is supposed to be harboured by West-India Negroes of his acquaintance.” Isaac Wilkins, the son of a Jamaica planter and a 1760 King’s graduate, advertised in 1765 for the runaway Mingo. Like other slaves, some owned by King’s figures took advantage of the War of Independence to seize their freedom. Oliver DeLancey, an original King’s

College governor and business partner of the slave trader John Watts, who owned twenty-three slaves at his farm in Bloomingdale village (near Columbia's current location) in 1775, advertised for a runaway slave two years later, when New York City was occupied by the British. When British forces evacuated the city in 1783, some 3,000 slaves who had escaped to British lines accompanied them. They included another slave owned by DeLancey and two by King's graduate and donor Henry Holland.²⁰

Five of the slaves who left with the British had escaped from Philipse manor, a giant estate owned by Frederick Philipse III, a donor and founding King's governor and the father of a graduate. He was the grandson of a major slave trader and the third and last lord of the manor, which occupied a quarter of present-day Westchester County and was worked at its peak by 30 slaves and 26 white indentured servants. Philipse sided with the British during the War of Independence; as a result his manor and other property were confiscated and sold, including his slaves. He appears to have taken some slaves with him when he fled the country; others, elderly or infirm, were left behind and became public charges. As late as 1816, New York State was reimbursing the overseers of the poor of Yonkers for maintaining Philipse's former slave Betty at a cost of \$1.75 per week.²¹

5. King's, the Revolution, and Slavery

The War of Independence created a crisis for King's College. Closely tied to the Anglican Church, the college was a center of loyalism. A significant majority of graduates, faculty, and governors sided with the British. Many emigrated during or after the War of Independence, including President Myles Cooper, a staunch defender of British policies and the author of passionate loyalist propaganda made him "one of the most hated men in America. Soon after the battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, Cooper escaped to a British warship a few steps ahead of a patriotic mob. During the war, the college suspended operations, and when independence was achieved there was considerable talk of abolishing it and starting a new one. But thanks in large part to the efforts of Governor George Clinton and Mayor James Duane (among the handful of King's governors to side with the patriots), the institution survived, now rechristened Columbia College. It reopened its doors in 1784 with a group of regents appointed by the state; in 1787 they were replaced by a self-perpetuating board of trustees.²²

Slavery, too, survived the American Revolution. But the struggle for independence made slavery, for the first time, the subject of widespread public debate. The rise of a revolutionary ideology centered on individual liberty convinced a number of patriot leaders of slavery's incompatibility with the ideals of the nation they were struggling to create. Of more immediate import to New York's slaves, however, were the actions of British officials who offered freedom to the slaves of patriots in order to weaken the revolutionary cause. During British occupation, New York City became "an island of freedom in a sea of slavery," a haven for fugitive slaves from rural New York,

New Jersey, and Connecticut, as well as for hundreds of black refugees who had fled to British lines in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. As noted above, over 3,000 left with the British when they evacuated the city. Many who remained had imbibed the ideology of liberty. An advertisement for Jack, who ran away in 1791, noted that “he passes for a free fellow.” The owner asked that Jack be delivered to Daniel Ludlow, a member of a prominent mercantile family who had attended King’s College in the 1760s. However, as soon as the British departed, the buying and selling of slaves resumed; James Barclay, King’s Class of 1766 and before the war owner of an auction room where slaves were sold, revived his business, posting numerous advertisements including a “sober, honest fellow” for sale in December 1783 and a woman and her three children in 1786.²³

The fateful question of slavery’s future in the new republic became an issue at the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia in 1787. Among the fifty-five delegates were four Columbians – William Samuel Johnson, Columbia’s president from 1787 to 1800; Rufus King, a trustee from 1806 to 1824; Gouverneur Morris, who had graduated from Kings in 1765 and would serve as a trustee from 1805 to 1816; and Alexander Hamilton, who attended classes in 1775 but left to join the revolutionary struggle and returned to Columbia as a trustee in 1787, serving until his death in 1804. Their actions with regard to slavery differed dramatically.

President Johnson, a slaveowner, was quite close to southern delegates. While representing Connecticut in Congress in 1785 he had tried to sell a recalcitrant slave to

one of the southern members. At the Constitutional Convention, he said nothing about slavery but supported the efforts of South Carolina and Georgia to allow states to continue to import slaves for twenty years. Charles C. Pinckney, the South Carolina statesman, seems to have had Johnson in mind when he said that he found New England delegates as “liberal and candid” (I. e., willing to accommodate southern slave owners) “as any men anywhere.”²⁴

Rufus King grew up in a slaveowning family in Massachusetts, but imbibed some of the antislavery ideas inspired by the Revolution. As a member of Congress in the 1780s, he sought to bar the institution from the new nation’s western territories. “To suffer the continuance of slaves until they can gradually be emancipated in states already overrun with them,” he wrote, “may be pardonable ... but to introduce them into countries where none now exist, countries which ... we have boasted of as an asylum to the oppressed of the earth can never be forgiven.” At the constitutional convention, however, King said little about slavery. He made brief remarks opposing the clauses allowing the slave trade to continue and counting three-fifths of slaves in apportioning representation in the House of Representatives. King hoped to see slavery die out but felt no urgency about the matter. When a Quaker antislavery petition was presented to the Senate in 1790, where King now served, he declared that Congress had no power over the institution. King served as ambassador to Great Britain in the 1790s. After his return to the United States, he bought a farm on Long Island and purchased at least one slave, a woman he manumitted in 1812.²⁵

The most outspoken critic of slavery among the Columbia-connected delegates was Gouverneur Morris. His father, the owner of Morrisania, a large estate that straddled the East River, had owned 46 slaves in 1762, possibly the largest single holding in New York colony at that time. At the 1777 convention that drafted a new constitution for New York, Morris unsuccessfully tried to have a clause added directing the legislature to take steps, “consistent with ... private property,” toward abolition, “so that in future ages, every human being who breathes the air of this state, shall enjoy the privileges of a freeman.” At the constitutional convention, Morris delivered a strong condemnation of slavery while opposing the three-fifths clause: “It was a nefarious institution. It was the curse of heaven on the states where it prevailed... The admission of slaves into the representation ... comes to this: 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 citizen of Pa. or N. J.” Yet Morris, like King, buried his doubts to become a strong supporter of the Constitution; indeed, James Madison credited him with the leading role on the Committee on Style that worked out the document’s final wording.²⁶

As for Alexander Hamilton, having grown up in the Caribbean he was more acquainted with slavery in its most brutal form than the other Columbians. He seems to have developed at an early age a strong aversion to the institution. But he generally

allowed other priorities – personal advancement, American nationalism, the protection of property rights – to override this conviction. The money that sent him to study on the mainland derived from slavery, and he married Elizabeth Schuyler, a member of a major slaveholding New York family. Like other patriots, he freely used the argument that British measures were reducing Americans to metaphorical slavery. Unlike many of them he also spoke out about real slavery, calling it a source of weakness in the newly independent nation as it interfered with the development of industry and commerce and encouraged “avarice and lust” among whites. During the War of Independence he urged the enlistment of blacks in Washington’s army, writing that with “proper management” they could become “very excellent soldiers.” To fears that this would be a step toward emancipation, Hamilton replied, “this circumstance, I confess, has no small weight in inducing me in favor of this unfortunate class of men.” Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hamilton rejected the idea of innate black inferiority--“their natural faculties,” he wrote, “are as good as ours.” Nonetheless, passionately devoted to the project of creating a strong national government he said nothing about slavery at the constitutional convention, and reluctantly acquiesced in the three-fifths clause, concluding that without it “no union could have possibly been formed.” His contributions to the Federalist Papers said nothing about slavery.²⁷

6. Columbians and the Manumission Society

In July 1788, New Yorkers celebrated the ratification of the constitution with a grand procession of the city's professions, trades, and civic organizations. The president, professors, and students of Columbia College marched behind a banner, "Science and Liberty mutually adorn and support each other." Any disappointment that the constitution did nothing to promote the end of slavery remained unspoken. Yet attitudes toward slavery had evolved in New York as a result of the Revolution. Already, the first organized efforts to abolish the institution in New York had made their appearance. In 1785, a group of 18 leading citizens founded the New York Manumission Society. A majority were Quakers, but the Society also included some of the city's most prominent patriots of other denominations, including a number of persons closely associated with Columbia. As suggested by its full name—the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been or May be Liberated—the group assumed the role of guardian of the state's slaves and free blacks. Compared to later abolitionist organizations the Manumission Society was genteel, conservative, and paternalistic. It denied membership to blacks. Its constitution forthrightly condemned "the odious practice of enslaving our fellow-men," but it claimed that because blacks were afflicted with poverty and "hostile prejudices," and "habituated to submission," abolition must come gradually and whites must take the lead in securing it: "the unhappy Africans are the least able to assert their rights."²⁸

The Manumission Society eventually grew to a few hundred members, including merchants, bankers, ship owners, and lawyers. Many were themselves slaveholders,

including half the signatories on the society's first legislative petition, in 1786. Its first president was the King's graduate John Jay, the son of a major colonial slave-trading merchant and son-in-law of a member of the Livingston family. Jay owned five slaves while he headed the organization, and one as late as 1810. (He later explained that he purchased slaves in order to free them, after "their faithful services shall have afforded a reasonable retribution.") Nonetheless, Jay became convinced during the struggle for independence that the continuation of slavery was incompatible with the principles for which patriots were fighting. The country's "prayers to heaven for liberty will be impious," he wrote in 1780, unless steps were taken to abolish slavery. Five years later, he declared, "I wish to see all unjust and unnecessary discriminations everywhere abolished, and that the time may soon come when all our inhabitants of every colour and denomination shall be free and equal partakers of our political liberty." In 1816, Jay's son Peter, a Columbia graduate and later a long-serving trustee, followed in his father's footsteps as president of the society. At the 1821 New York constitutional convention, he strongly but unsuccessfully opposed a provision establishing a prohibitive property qualification for black men to vote. He emphatically denied that "the intellect of a black man is naturally inferior to that of a white man," and expressed surprise that so retrograde an idea had been expressed "in an assembly as enlightened as this."²⁹

The Manumission Society's members were the only whites actively campaigning for an end to slavery and to improve the conditions of black New Yorkers. Over the course of its life (it survived until 1848), the society offered legal assistance to blacks

seeking freedom, worked strenuously to oppose the kidnapping of free blacks and slave catching in the city, brought to court captains engaged illegally in the African slave trade, and sponsored antislavery lectures and literature. It encouraged individuals to manumit their slaves and monitored the fulfillment of promises to do so. And it established the African Free School, which became the backbone of black education in the city. Partly as a result of its efforts, New York's legislature in 1799 finally adopted a measure for gradual abolition, becoming the next to last northern state to do so (New Jersey delayed until 1804). The law sought to make abolition as orderly as possible. It freed not living slaves but slave children born after July 4, 1799, and only after they had served "apprenticeships" of twenty-eight years for men and twenty-five for women, thus compensating owners for the future loss of their property. Slaves continued to run away, including one advertised by Hubert Van Wagenen in 1802, the year he graduated from Columbia. In 1817, the legislature decreed that all slaves who had been living at the time of the 1799 act would be emancipated on July 4, 1827. On that day, slavery in New York finally came to an end.³⁰

Columbians played an important part in the Manumission Society's activities and in the death of slavery in New York. Robert Troup, Alexander Hamilton's roommate at King's, who graduated in 1774, presided at the group's first meeting. Robert R. Livingston was among those present, as were John Murray, Jr., the son of a wealthy Quaker merchant and later a Columbia trustee; John Lawrence, a trustee, slaveowner, and brother of a West India planter; and Matthew Clarkson, a regent from 1784 to 1787, who

introduced an emancipation bill in the state legislature in 1789. Alexander Hamilton joined the Society at its second meeting and succeeded Jay as president for one year. He and Troup tried, but failed, to have the group require its own members to free their slaves. (Troup himself waited a while to do so – he manumitted four slaves between 1802 and 1814.) Upon his return to New York in 1798 after serving as Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton resumed working with the society, defending in court blacks claimed by supposed owners from out of state.³¹

Other prominent public figures connected with both Columbia and the Manumission Society included Gouverneur Morris; Marinus Willet, a King's College graduate who went on to serve as New York's mayor in 1807 and 1808 (during which time he owned two slaves); and Egbert Benson, a King's graduate and Columbia trustee who served in Congress and on the state Supreme Court in the early republic. James C. Duane, a Columbia trustee, federal district court judge, and owner of several slaves (although he freed a number his wife inherited from her father in the early 1790s) was another founding member. Two Columbian trustees in the society were Presbyterian ministers – John Mason and Samuel Miller, the latter the owner of one slave in 1790. In an address sponsored by the Society, Rev. Miller denied that blacks were incapable of being “industrious members of society.... Make them freemen; and they will soon be found to have the manners, the character, and the virtues of freedom.” Benjamin Moore, who had served as interim president of King's College after the hasty departure of Myles Cooper and would return as Columbia's president in 1801, joined the Manumission

Society in its first year. Like many other members, he owned slaves – two according to the 1810 census, during his term as Columbia’s president.³²

7. Columbia Faculty and Students and Slavery

Nicholas Murray Butler, who directed the university’s affairs for nearly half of the twentieth century, recalled the years from 1800 to the Civil War as Columbia’s “long period of discouragement.” The College remained a small, elite institution, whose trustees failed to raise sufficient funds to keep it out of the red and firmly resisted efforts to modernize the classically-based curriculum. As a result, Columbia long remained on the margins of the city’s burgeoning intellectual and commercial life. When it moved uptown in the late 1850s, it had only six faculty members and far fewer students than Harvard or Yale. Its library, which “discouraged the lending of books,” consisted of 18,000 volumes, a figure dwarfed by Harvard’s 98,000 and Yale’s 54,000. Columbia remained closely tied to the Episcopal Church. Many of the trustees were wardens, vestrymen, and rectors of Trinity Church, the city’s wealthiest religious institution and most of the students were of that religion, meaning that Columbia found itself isolated from the economic life of the city, increasingly overseen by transplanted New Englanders and other men of diverse religious affiliations.³³

Columbia’s trustees and graduates, were mainly ministers and lawyers, with relatively few bankers and merchants. At the inauguration ceremony for Charles King,

who became Columbia's president in 1849, Professor John McVickar expressed the hope that King would create "a new bond of sympathy between the College and the needs and wants of our great commercial metropolis." He did not succeed. Toward the end of the Civil War, George Templeton Strong, a long-serving trustee, lamented that Columbia had failed "to secure any hold on the community around it Our own alumni give us a cold shoulder, and small blame to them." Unlike in the late eighteenth century, moreover, almost no Columbia graduates became nationally prominent political figures. Yet Columbia remained embedded in a city with a political culture sympathetic to the South. Even as slavery died in New York State, the city's prosperity came to depend in significant degree on connections with southern slavery. New York's merchants dominated the cotton trade, the single most important economic enterprise in mid-nineteenth-century America, its bankers extended credit to help finance the expansion of southern slavery, its insurance companies sold policies so that owners would be reimbursed on the death of a slave. Although few graduates went into commerce, many came from mercantile or professional families with southern connections.³⁴

This was a college unlikely to become a hotbed of radicalism on slavery or any other subject. Into the nineteenth century, Columbia's administrators and many trustees and faculty continued to own slaves. As noted above, Benjamin Moore owned two while serving as president. No information exists about his successor, Rev. William Harris, but William A. Duer, who succeeded Harris as president in 1829, had advertised a twenty-one year old "negro wench ... having fourteen years to serve" for sale as late as

1814.³⁵ Rev. John Mason owned a slave while serving as provost from 1811 to 1816 (when the position was abolished). Several trustees owned slaves into the nineteenth century – for example, Dr. John Charlton (two slaves in 1800), John Cosine (six in 1800), Edward Dunscomb (3 in 1810, when he was sheriff of New York County), and Richard Varick (who freed three slaves between 1810 and 1812). Some trustee owners who manumitted slaves in the early nineteenth century charged them for the privilege. John N. Abeel gave freedom to Phoebe in 1812, for a “consideration” of 50 dollars; Cornelius L. Bogert freed Rose in 1813 provided that she worked for him for an additional three and a half years while paying him \$2 per month. At least twenty-one faculty members owned slaves before the institution’s abolition in New York. David Hosack and Samuel Bard, prominent medical professors at Columbia and founders of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, owned, respectively, five and eight slaves in the early nineteenth century. Professor of Medicine Edward Stevens owned a plantation with twelve slaves in the West Indies. Professor of Greek and Roman Antiquities Elijah D. Ratoone owned two slaves in 1800.³⁶

Nonetheless, the strong presence of Columbians in the Manumission Society suggests that the College’s relationship to slavery had changed since pre-revolutionary days. Between 1785 and the final end of slavery in 1827, along with the graduates and trustees mentioned above, at least twelve Columbia professors joined the Manumission Society, although many of them, like other members of the society, owned slaves. A few faculty were outspoken critics of slavery. William Cochran, who briefly taught Greek

and Latin at Columbia in the 1780s, published essays in New York newspapers pointing to the contradiction between the language of the Declaration of Independence and the spectacle of “men set up to auction in our streets, and sold exactly like horses or oxen.” The response, which he later recalled as “scoff and ridicule,” was one reason he emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1788. Peter Wilson, a Professor of Greek and Latin, and John Daniel Gros, Professor of Moral Philosophy and German, published antislavery writings. (Wilson was also a slaveholder; in 1812 he manumitted a slave, Isabel.) In his Natural Principles of Rectitude (1795), Gros condemned slavery was “inhuman, unnatural and disgraceful to mankind.” No faculty member published a defense of slavery while at Columbia.³⁷

Other than Professor Gros, however, few Columbia faculty appear to have discussed slavery in class. The school’s heavily classical curriculum and elite atmosphere did not encourage such discussions, but surviving lecture notes from courses where the subject would be relevant reveal little or no mention of the institution. John McVickar, the son of a wealthy importer of Irish linens and an Episcopal priest, taught Rhetoric, Moral Philosophy, and Political Economy at Columbia for forty years beginning in 1817. His influential Outlines of Political Economy (1825), said almost nothing about slavery other than to comment on the “expensiveness” of slave labor. Lecture notes from McVickar’s Columbia courses on political economy and history from 1839, 1841, and 1849 contain no reference to slavery other than the fact that European colonies in tropical areas generally relied on slave labor. Professor of Law William

Betts, an 1820 graduate, in 1850 delivered a public address on the causes of New York City's prosperity. He offered many explanations, ranging from the city's system of laws to the moral character of its inhabitants, but failed to mention New York's lucrative relationship with the slave South.³⁸

Especially after the antislavery impulse inspired by the Revolution faded, the general attitude of the Columbia faculty regarding slavery seems to have been indifference. Some discussion, outside of class, did take place among students. In 1786, the Manumission Society established an award – a gold medal – to be presented to the student who delivered “the best oration” at Columbia's commencement “exposing ... the injustice and cruelty of the slave trade and ill policy of holding the Negroes in slavery.” Perhaps as a response, a graduate speaking at the commencement ceremony that year addressed the audience on the evil of holding “your fellow men ... in hopeless and perpetual slavery.” Daniel Tompkins, Class of 1795, penned essays for a literary society on the “inhumanity of slavery” as well as mistreatment of the Indians. American patriots, he concluded, should be “civilizing the Indians and freeing and civilizing the Africans. America will then be unparalleled.” Nonetheless, he owned one slave in 1800. Tompkins went on to serve as counsel for the Manumission Society. As New York's governor in 1817, he pressed the legislature to enact the law that provided for the final end of slavery in the state. Another undergraduate, Egbert Benson, Jr., Class of 1806, produced an essay condemning the slave trade, although it is unclear whether for a class or an extracurricular audience.³⁹

The Calliopean Society, a debating society founded in 1788 that included Columbia students and other young men, in 1789 debated “whether it is justifiable to retain the Negroes in slavery.” According to notes of the proceedings, “the dispute was decided in the negative.” No further discussion of slavery took place during the next several years. But between 1816, when its minutes begin, and 1836, the Philolexian, a student society, debated one or another aspect of the slavery issue no fewer than fifteen times. The outcome, in general, was mild hostility to slavery coupled with opposition to general emancipation. In 1817, for example, the Society debated whether emancipation would be “beneficial to the country.” Those speaking for the negative acknowledged that the institution was “repugnant to every feeling of humanity,” but feared that abolition would lead to violent revenge. The group concluded that abolition would not be “beneficial.” The following year, however, in a similar debate, proponents of abolition were victorious. (In this debate speakers for the negative included Henry Nicholas Cruger, Class of 1819, a descendant of eighteenth-century slave traders.) In subsequent debates in the 1820s and 1830s, members of the Philolexian voted that slavery could not be “justified on any moral principle,” but that the colonization of blacks in Africa was preferable to immediate abolition with blacks remaining in the United States.⁴⁰

8. Columbia and Colonization

In the 1820s and 1830s the preferred approach to the slavery question among antislavery Columbians was not immediate abolition but colonization – that is gradually ending slavery and encouraging or requiring the freed slaves (and blacks already free) to leave the country. The Manumission Society had not coupled calls for abolition with any plan for the removal of blacks from New York State or the country. Its members assumed that blacks who gained their freedom would remain in the United States as a laboring class. But the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 marked a dramatic shift in discourse about slavery. Colonization became the respectable approach to the problem of slavery, attracting support from leading politicians across the political spectrum – from James Monroe to Henry Clay and, later, Abraham Lincoln. It promised a gradual, peaceful process that would rid the country of slavery, with the consent of slaveholders, and of the rapidly growing free black population. Unfortunately for the aspirations of colonizationists, nearly all free blacks rejected this policy. They insisted that they had a right to remain in the United States and enjoy the same rights as other Americans. They charged that by describing blacks as a dangerous, degraded population that could never achieve equality in this country, colonizationists exacerbated the very racism that they claimed made abolition without removal impossible.⁴¹

The formation of the American Colonization Society was followed by the creation of a series of auxiliary organizations in New York City. These aimed to raise money for the parent group and spread the colonization message. The movement attracted support from prominent New Yorkers, including a succession of mayors and governors. From

the outset, Columbians played a prominent role. The New-York Auxiliary Colonization Society, founded in 1817, held its initial meeting in the office of Mayor John Radcliffe, a Columbia trustee (and, at least until 1810, a slaveowner). Its president was Henry Rutgers, a wealthy 1766 graduate of King's who went on to a political career in the early republic, owned five slaves in 1800, three in 1810, and as late as 1823, in his will, provided for the support of "the negro wench slave named Hannah, being superannuated." John Murray, Jr., a Columbia trustee, was one of the vice-presidents, and Dr. John Beck, an 1813 graduate and later a trustee, the recording secretary. One of the managers was John Griscom, a Professor of Chemistry at Columbia, who took an "active interest for many years" in colonization. Shortly before his death, he forwarded two large boxes of books to a school in Liberia. Other founding members included John B. Romeyn, Class of 1795 and a trustee, who owned two slaves as late as 1810, and Alexander McLeod, an 1818 graduate of the college.⁴²

Every college president in New England, New York, and New Jersey endorsed the movement, including William A. Duer, Columbia's president from 1829 to 1842. Duer's family had long-standing connections to slavery. His grandfather owned a large slave plantation in Antigua and his father, William Duer, a revolutionary-era patriot, an estate in Rhinebeck on the Hudson River until various banking and land schemes landed him in debtor's prison. William A. Duer became a lawyer, member of the state assembly, and judge on the state Supreme Court. Into the nineteenth century, he owned slaves, but he also signed a petition to Congress calling for abolition of the slave trade. When the

Colonization Society of the City of New York was founded in 1830, Duer, by now at the helm of Columbia, became its president. The Society's first publication, which carried Duer's signature, acknowledged the wrongs done to blacks in the United States but warned that the most pressing problem facing the nation was growth of "a numerous free population of a distinct and inferior race" in its large cities. This led to a spirited response from a public meeting of black New Yorkers. "We claim this country, the place of our birth, and not Africa," they declared, "as our mother country." They denounced the Society and Duer for deepening prejudice and unfairly denigrating the city's black community.⁴³

Duer resigned as president of the society in 1838 because his Columbia duties left him with little free time. Before that, however, he presided at numerous public meetings to support the idea of colonization and raise funds for the ACS and for a settlement in Liberia the New York group was planning in cooperation with Philadelphia colonizationists. Like other advocates of colonization, Duer denounced the immediate abolitionist movement. A bitter divide existed between radical abolitionists, black and white, who insisted that slaves should not only be speedily freed but should become equal members of American society, and advocates of colonization. Colonizationists played a major role in New York's anti-black, anti-abolitionist riot of 1834, and many opposed efforts to promote black education on the grounds that it would make blacks less likely to leave the United States. At the annual meeting of the New York Society in 1835, Duer insisted that by causing "resentment and alarm" among white southerners, abolitionism

set back the cause of the “gradual extinction of slavery,” since nothing could be achieved “without the consent and cooperation of the South.”⁴⁴

Duer also promoted his views in a series of works on “constitutional jurisprudence” designed as textbooks for college lecturers. The first, which appeared in 1833, said almost nothing about slavery. The second, published ten years later, mentioned that slave labor was less efficient than free labor, and then turned to a vigorous denunciation of the abolitionists, “zealots” who, “with the blindness of ignorance, the virulence of bigotry ... and madness of fanaticism,” had seriously retarded the work of ending slavery. In 1856, as the sectional crisis accelerated, Duer published a new edition that praised the American Colonization Society and opposed the westward expansion of slavery. But again, his strongest language was directed against abolitionists, “who, with the blindness of ignorance and fanaticism, denounce all who refuse to cooperate in their impracticable schemes.” Presumably, he meant advocates of colonization like himself.⁴⁵

Along with Duer, numerous other Columbians were connected to the colonization societies of New York City and New York State. They included, among officers, the rev. Gardiner Spring, a trustee, and graduates Alexander Proudift, Hugh Maxwell, John W. Mulligan, and Garbriel Disosway. Rev. Jonathan Wainwright, a Columbia trustee and “member for life” of the American Colonization Society, delivered sermons insisting that abolition without colonization would lead to “the immediate destruction of the white population.” A number of faculty were also involved in the colonization movement at one time or another, including Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature Samuel

Turner, Professor of Chemistry Charles Chandler, and Professor of Mathematics and Science John Kemp.⁴⁶

Other Columbians also attacked the abolitionist movement. Chemistry Professor James Renwick, who wrote political biographies on the side, in 1841 published a life of John Jay that carefully distinguished Jay's belief in gradual emancipation from the views of "the modern abolitionists." Jay, Renwick insisted, did not "deny the abstract right of holding slaves" or call for an "exertion of authority by the federal government" against slavery, and "avoided any attempt at agitation in those States where the condition of society had not prepared them for the measure." In short, Jay was "a sound statesman," not "a fanatic and disorganizer." Jay's son William, himself a prominent abolitionist, condemned Renwick's account as a distortion of his father's views, attributing it to the "cupidity" of the publisher, Harper and Brothers, anxious to market the book in the South.⁴⁷

9. John Jay II: Columbia Abolitionist

In the decades before the Civil War, Columbia produced only two graduates who can be called abolitionists. One was Theodore Sedgwick III, an 1829 graduate and later a U. S. district attorney for New York, who joined the New York Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830s and was one of the lawyers who represented the slaves in the famous Amistad case. Far more active in abolitionist affairs was John Jay II, a Columbia graduate in

1836. Jay learn his hatred of slavery at home, not at Columbia; he was the grandson of John Jay and son of William Jay, a judge who became president of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society in 1835. The previous year, while still a student, John Jay II became a manager of the New-York Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, whose address to fellow citizens condemned slavery as a system of "violence, outrage, and robbery" and demanded immediate abolition. Jay tried to interest fellow undergraduates in the society but without success. One, invited to attend a meeting, declined, saying "I thought I could spend my time more profitably." The Society's six officers and eighteen managers included one other Columbian – William Steele, an 1830 graduate. In 1834, Jay and some friends organized to defend the home of Arthur Tappan, president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, during New York's anti-abolitionist riots.⁴⁸

Jay's involvement in the Young Men's Society marked the beginning of a long career of abolitionist agitation. He became the leading lawyer defending fugitive slaves in the city in the 1840s and 1850s. He also launched a crusade against racism in the Episcopal church that, given the close connection between the college and that denomination, brought him into direct conflict with prominent Columbians. Eighty percent of Columbia's trustees were Episcopalians, and many of the church's leaders in New York had graduated from the college. New York's Episcopal diocese, the largest and wealthiest in the country, maintained cordial relations with southern Episcopalians and strove to avoid any controversy related to slavery. Bishop Benjamin T. Onderdonk, a Columbia graduate and trustee, feared alienating southerners, who made up eighty

percent of the students who trained as Episcopal clergy at General Theological Seminary. He excluded blacks from the institution and the annual Episcopal Convention refused to accord representation to the black congregation of St. Philip's Church. In speeches, pamphlets, and resolutions at successive conventions. Jay denounced his church for "ministering at the altar of slavery."⁴⁹

In 1839, Bishop Onderdonk denied a place at the seminary to the black applicant Alexander Crummell. Jay wrote that the church had "deliberately established a system of Caste" among the clergy. "That Bishops should ever side with the oppressor is strange indeed," he added. Many Columbians in the church did not appreciate Jay's campaigns. Along with the bishop, his efforts to secure representation for St. Philip's were opposed, among others, by William Harison, Class of 1811 and treasurer of the vestry of Trinity Church, and Rev. Hugh Smith, Class of 1813. When the convention finally acceded to Jay's campaign in 1853, George Templeton Strong, an active member of Trinity Church, noted in his diary, "John Jay's annual motion carried at last, and the nigger delegation admitted into the Diocesan Convention." Crummell completed his education at Cambridge University in England, and went on to a prominent career as a black religious leader. As for Onderdonk, charged, in the diarist Philip Hone's words, with "habitual drunkenness" and "an undue fondness for some of the female lambs of his flock," he was barred by the church from performing ministerial duties.⁵⁰

10. Columbia, P and S, Race Science, and Black Students

Like most northern colleges (with the exception of a handful including Amherst, Bowdoin, Dartmouth, and Oberlin), Columbia admitted no black students before the Civil War. How many tried to enter remains unknown. James McCune Smith, a product of the African Free School, applied in 1831 and was rejected, he and other abolitionists claimed, “on account of his complexion.” Smith went on to earn a medical degree from the University of Glasgow. He returned to the United States to practice as a physician and became a leading figure in the abolitionist movement. Columbia’s whites-only character did not derive from a desire to attract students from the South. Unlike Harvard, Yale, and especially Princeton, with their large southern contingents, Columbia had fewer than a dozen southern undergraduates during the entire period from 1790 to 1860. Because it provided no accommodations or meals for students, the college attracted almost exclusively students from New York City. Geographical diversity meant an undergraduate from Long Island or New Jersey⁵¹.

Between the late 1820s and the 1840s, however, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, an independent institution founded in 1807, which absorbed Columbia’s tiny medical department seven years later and which in turn was absorbed into Columbia in 1860, allowed three black students to attend lectures and laboratory classes in preparation for receiving medical degrees. This was not the result of a sudden upsurge of racial egalitarianism. Many of the founders of P and S were slaveowners and members of the faculty contributed to the era’s scientific racism. While still an undergraduate at

Columbia, John Wakefield Francis, who went on to become a P and S professor and trustee, wrote a paper “On the Bodily and Mental Inferiority of the Negro,” which he presented to a medical society that included faculty members of Columbia and P and S. Francis explored various explanations for what he called blacks’ “manifest inferiority,” but his clinching argument rested on his contention that “there never has appeared among the negro a single poet, a single mathematician, in a word a single character who can claim preeminence by the power of the mind.” Several faculty of Columbia’s medical school testified in 1808 in the case of Alexander Whistelo, which revolved around a paternity suit but addressed the issue of innate racial characteristics.⁵²

The president of P and S from 1831 to 1843 was John Augustine Smith, a member of a prominent Virginia family, and a faculty member from 1808 to 1820. In his “Course of Anatomical Instruction” during his term on the faculty, Smith sought to demonstrate the superiority of “the European” over other races, including the Mongol, Malay, and Ethiopian, from an examination of their “anatomical structure,” including “facial angle” and “capacity of the cranium.” Years later, in 1843, Smith delivered a public lecture in New York City on the “different races of men.” Smith concluded that the “Caucasian ... might justly be said to stand at the head of all the races of the earth,” while blacks’ “mental powers are upon an inferior scale.” In measurements such as “facial angle,” the “Ethiopian race” was far closer to the orang outan than Caucasians. Smith added that “this can never justify any people in keeping them in slavery.” Nonetheless, Smith was

convinced that if freed and allowed to remain in the United States, blacks were “sure to be exterminated,” and he became an avid proponent of colonization.⁵³

On the eve of the Civil War, Dr. John C. Dalton, a P and S professor from 1855 to 1869 and later the institution’s president, published a treatise in which he concluded that “the size of the cerebrum in different races” corresponded to “their grade of intelligence.” The smallest cerebrum was found among “the savage negro and Indian tribes,” the largest in “the enlightened European races.” A prominent P and S graduate, Joseph LeConte, who grew up on a slave plantation in Georgia, received his degree in 1845 and was a professor at the University of South Carolina during and immediately after the Civil War. He was so incensed by the admission of black students as part of Radical Reconstruction that he resigned and moved as far away as he could while still remaining in the country – taking up a professorship at Berkeley. Like other medical scientists of the era, LeConte’s writings, replete with discussion of selective breeding, inheritance of racial characteristics, and the dangers of racial mixing, gave a scientific veneer to racism.⁵⁴

The admission of black students to P and S arose from the American Colonization Society’s desire to send black physicians to Liberia. White doctors who had made the journey had perished from tropical diseases. Three aspiring black physicians – John Brown, Washington Davis, and David McDonogh—were allowed to study at P and S, their fees and expenses paid by the Colonization Society. They were admitted on condition that they emigrated upon receiving their medical degrees. Things did not work out exactly as planned. At the conclusion of their studies, two of the students, Brown and

McDonogh, decided not to leave for Liberia, whereupon President Smith withheld their degrees. Brown, the first professionally trained black physician in the city, made his living as a teacher and public lecturer and died in 1840. McDonogh, the son of a colonizationist slaveowner in Louisiana, embarked on a long career practicing medicine at the New York Ear and Eye Infirmary, where he appears to have been accepted by the other physicians. Davis, the son of black Americans who had emigrated to Liberia in the 1820s, had been brought back to the United States for education by an agent of the ACS. In 1835 he addressed a pro-colonization meeting in Philadelphia. He completed his studies at P and S and practiced medicine in Liberia from 1835 until his death in 1853.⁵⁵

The presence of these black students does not alter the fact that P and S maintained a whites-only admission policy. This became a matter of public controversy in 1850 when James Parker Barnett was summarily expelled. Barnett's father, also named James, ran a metal-working business in the city. The younger Barnett, born in 1830, was educated at a private academy, then at the University of the City of New York (now NYU), where he graduated fifth in his class. He entered P and S in 1848 as part of a class of 230 students, the large majority of whom, unlike him, had not completed college. Barnett attended two of the three required years of lectures. But on October 1, 1850, shortly after the start of his third year, he was summoned before a group of faculty members. A "southern gentleman" at the College (P and S, unlike Columbia College, had many southern students) had complained that Barnett was "colored." Asked about his race, the light-skinned Barnett replied, "I must confess that my mother is not of the

Anglo Saxon race, but of Creole descent My father is neither of the Anglo-Saxon race.” (Later, Barnett would describe his father as a “French Creole gentleman” and his mother as a “French Creole lady.”) The faculty group informed Barnett that he could not continue at the school. “They said they ... were mere servants of the trustees,” Barnett reported. “That they had a rule binding upon them not to admit colored students, that they had repeatedly refused former applications.” “Now, Mr. Bennett,” declared Professor of Obstetrics Chandler R. Gilman, “do not come here again, where you are not wanted.”

Bennett and his father did not go away quietly. When the trustees appointed a faculty committee to look into the matter, the senior Bennett sent them an impassioned plea. “I am a citizen of this great state of New York,” he wrote, “and annually pay a tax of \$125.00 on my real estate, for the support of the government and education of the youth of the state.... I cannot be willing to believe that any citizen can thus be deprived of his rights.” But on October 30, 1850, a special meeting of trustees and faculty voted to uphold Barnett’s expulsion. They claimed that Barnett had intentionally misled the school about his race. His sister had married the black abolitionist Dr. James McCune Smith. Smith knew that in 1846, a black student had applied for admission to P and S and been rejected, because, according to Frederick Douglass’ Newspaper, “of the anticipated opposition of students from slave states. He had inquired whether a black applicant could be admitted, and been told he could not, so Barnett did not mention his race when he applied.

Barnett's father next brought the situation to the attention of the indefatigable John Jay II. Jay filed a petition in the Supreme Court of New York for a writ of mandamus, to compel P and S to readmit Barnett. The petition dealt with the injury to his reputation Barnett had suffered by expulsion, not racial discrimination per se (partly because this was not illegal in New York State and partly because Barnett, according to a report in an abolitionist newspaper, "would pass anywhere for white.") In March 1851, Justice John W. Edmonds, a strongly antislavery jurist, issued the writ. Eighteen months then elapsed before the trustees proposed that Barnett be awarded an honorary degree, but the senior Barnett rejected this option. The P and S trustees then decided to fight the writ in court. Their lawyer contended that having a "person of colour" as a student would injure the college because other students would withdraw. In April 1853, the case came before Justice James J. Roosevelt of the Superior Court, Columbia Class of 1815 and a slaveowner in his youth. Roosevelt ruled the original writ invalid. Bennett went on to receive a medical degree from Dartmouth. He was serving as a physician at the Colored Orphan Asylum during the New York City draft riots of 1863 and helped evacuate the children as the building burned.⁵⁶

11. Columbians and the Irrepressible Conflict

Few Columbians in the 19th century played significant roles in national affairs or made a mark on sectional politics as the irrepressible conflict intensified. Some who did

identified with the Democratic party – notably John L. O’Sullivan, an 1831 graduate who in the 1840s edited the New York Morning News, where he was an outspoken expansionist and coined the phrase “manifest destiny.” William F. Havemeyer, an 1823 graduate who made a fortune in the sugar refining business, was twice elected mayor of New York City in the 1840s as a Democrat. Aligned with the “Barnburner” wing of the party, which opposed the expansion of slavery, he supported Martin Van Buren for president in 1848 as the candidate of the newly-formed Free Soil party. A few Columbians, such as Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy Charles W. Hackley, were emphatically pro-southern. “My sympathies are entirely with the South,” Hackley wrote to Senator and soon-to-be-Confederate president Jefferson Davis in December 1860. William B. Lawrence, an 1818 graduate of the college and the son-in-law of the wealthy merchant Archibald Gracie, became a fixture in Democratic politics in Rhode Island in the 1850s. He called for the annexation of Cuba, demanded vigorous enforcement of the fugitive slave law, and endorsed the Dred Scott decision. Rhode Island, he also insisted, violated the U. S. Constitution, as explicated in that ruling, by allowing black men to vote. Most Columbians, however, can be characterized as conservative Whigs, somewhat hostile to slavery, strongly opposed to the abolitionist movement, and not inclined to do anything that might threaten the stability of the Union or the city’s lucrative commerce with the slave South.⁵⁷

One Columbian who did have a prominent political career before the Civil War was Hamilton Fish, the son of Nicholas Fish, a wealthy merchant who served for many

years as chairman of Columbia's board of trustees and owned at least one slave when Hamilton, born in 1810, was a young child. An 1828 graduate of the college, Hamilton Fish went on to become one of the city's leading lawyers and a Columbia trustee from 1851 to 1893. As a Whig and then Republican, he served in Congress and as New York's governor between 1843 and 1857 and, later, under President Grant, as Secretary of State. Fish's law clients included some of the most wealthy New York families, including merchants involved in the southern trade, and, reflecting their views, he devoted himself to trying to preserve national unity. He was a life member of the American Colonization Society. Ironically, his election to the Senate in 1851 was delayed when James W. Beekman, another Columbia graduate and Whig, voted against Fish in the legislature, fearing he was too close to the more radical Whig Senator William Seward. In fact, once in the Senate, Fish said almost nothing about slavery, attempting to maintain the unity of the Whig party against what he called "the extremes of abolitionism and secessionism." He condemned the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 as a "flagrant outrage" because it reopened the "slavery agitation," but was reluctant to join the new Republican party: "I cannot consent ... to become an 'Agitator of the slavery question.'" By 1856, accepting the fact that the Whig party was dead, he endorsed Republican candidate John C. Fremont, while dissociating himself from "the useless, perpetual agitation of the slavery question" and "the general and indiscriminate denunciation of the institution of slavery."⁵⁸

The Columbia official most outspoken in opposition to slavery as the sectional crisis developed was Charles King, who became president of the College in 1849. His father, Rufus King, as noted above, said little about slavery at the constitutional convention but in the twilight of his career, as a U. S. Senator, led the unsuccessful fight in 1819 and 1820 to prevent the admission of Missouri to the Union as a slave state. Charles King abandoned a mercantile career in 1825 to become editor of the New York American, a position he occupied until 1845. King was by no means an abolitionist. “We detest slavery,” he wrote in 1832, “we have striven, and ever shall strive, against its extension in these United States; but, where it exists ... we would go to the utmost length to sustain the rights and safety of those whom circumstances have placed in the relation of masters.” But he treated abolitionists more sympathetically than other editors, declaring after the 1834 riots that violence would not destroy the movement – “fire cannot burn their convictions out of these men.” Articles from his newspaper were regularly reproduced and cited in the abolitionist press.⁵⁹

Before the Civil War, King as president tried to keep Columbia as an institution out of sectional politics. When a senior in 1851 delivered an oration in the chapel on the Fugitive Slave Law, King notified undergraduates that no political speeches would be allowed. Nonetheless, in 1854 he presided at the meeting that created the Kansas Emigrant Aid Society, which assisted northern migrants who would favor free labor in that contested territory. Two years later he spoke with great emotion – the Liberator called it a “thrilling speech” – at a mass meeting that followed the caning of Senator

Charles Sumner by South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks. King called slavery the “ignoble cause” of the suppression of “free thought, free speech, and a free press,” and referred to Washington, D. C. as the “camp of the enemy.” In 1859, King permitted several orators at Columbia’s commencement to make antislavery remarks.⁶⁰

Other prominent Columbians took a more moderate approach to the sectional crisis, seeking some kind of middle ground between pro-slavery radicalism and abolitionism. Probably typical were the College’s two renowned diarists, Philip Hone and George Templeton Strong. Hone had been a slaveowner – in 1809, at the age of 29, he manumitted a female slave. He later served as New York’s mayor in the 1820s and a Columbia trustee from 1824 to 1851. In his diary, he denounced “the two curses of our country ... fanaticism of the abolitionists of the North, and the violence of the nullifiers of the South.” When Governor George McDuffie of South Carolina in 1835 proclaimed slavery a benefit to the community, “sanctified by God and man in all ages,” Hone termed his message “ridiculous.” In the same year he took part in a “great meeting” that brought together leading New Yorkers of both parties “opposed to the incendiary proceedings of the abolitionists.” (Egbert Benson, Jr., Class of 1807, was one of the meeting’s vice-presidents.) Hone condemned the “inflammatory publications” abolitionists were sending into the South, but found Postmaster General Amos Kendall’s policy of allowing local postmasters to remove them from the mails a “remedy worse than the disease.... I do not choose to surrender the power of executing justice into the hands of the slave-owners of South Carolina.” The “terrible abolition question,” he

feared, was “fated ... to destroy the Union.” A year before his death, Hone strongly supported the Compromise of 1850 as a final settlement of “these horrible slavery questions.”⁶¹

Hone did not live to see the dissolution of the Union that he had come to fear. George Templeton Strong, an 1838 graduate, well-connected lawyer, one of Columbia’s most active trustees, and oft-quoted diarist, did. Strong’s diary reveals that he shared many of the prejudices of his era. He regularly used the word “nigger,” detested Irish immigrants, and made anti-Semitic comments as well. Nonetheless, he increasingly came to resent what he considered the South’s control of the national government and its supercilious attitude toward the North. Like Hone, Strong was thoroughly alarmed by the intensity of sectional passions in the late 1840s and joined in public meetings to support the Compromise of 1850. “Slave-holding is no sin,” he declared in his diary. In 1854, like many conservative northerners, he strongly opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. “I’m resisting awful temptations to avow myself a Free-Soiler,” he wrote. Now he claimed never to have doubted “the wrong of slavery.” He had not avowed this “because I could not affirm that all men were born free and equal.... Don’t believe all men so born.”⁶²

As with President King, the shocking assault on Charles Sumner outraged Strong and turned him further against the South. “They are ... a race of lazy, ignorant, coarse, sensual, swaggering, sordid, beggarly barbarians,” he wrote. He still maintained that “slavery is not a wrong, per se,” but now concluded that “as it exists at the South ... [it] is the greatest crime on the largest scale known to modern history.” The North had no right

to interfere with the institution where it existed, but should bar it from expanding into new territories. In other words, Strong had come around to the position occupied by the newly-created Republican party. Four years later, he wrote, “we may as well settle the question whether a president can or cannot be chosen without the advice and approval of the slaveholding interests; whether 300,000 owners of niggers have or have not a veto on the popular choice.”⁶³

On November 6, 1860, Strong cast “a lukewarm Republican vote” for Abraham Lincoln. The same day Rev. Morgan Dix, an 1848 graduate of Columbia College, the rector of Trinity Church, and, beginning in 1862, a Columbia trustee, rose from his sickbed, compelled by “conscience and duty” to vote “1st against Lincoln, and 2^{ndly} against Negro suffrage” (the subject of a referendum that went down to defeat.) In the ensuing secession crisis, prominent Columbians of all political persuasions, like most of the city’s business and professional elite, called for sectional reconciliation and concessions to the South. Hamilton Fish and John Jacob Astor, Jr., a Columbia trustee and one of the city’s wealthiest businessmen, who had reluctantly voted for Lincoln, were among the “leading men” of the city who gathered in December to devise a plan to avert disunion. Fish wrote in December 1860 that the North could “honorably concede almost all that they ask,” since “no concession can take away the great result of the victory.” Yet even Fish expressed surprise at the “extent of concessions” New York merchants were willing to make to the South, including allowing slavery to spread throughout the West. But as the crisis deepened, the mood even among New York businessman became

more bellicose, and long-simmering resentments over southern dictation rose to the surface. By January 1861, Strong was doubting the possibility of reconciliation. The only way to satisfy the South, he wrote, was to “declare slavery just, beneficent, and expedient,” and allow every southerner to “bring his niggers and his own slave code” with him into the North. “We shall have to fight them with their own weapons,” he concluded. “We shall be arming and drilling slave regiments within a year.” He was sure to add, however, “we northerners object to slavery on grounds of political economy, not ethics.”⁶⁴

12. Columbia and the Civil War

With the firing on Fort Sumter, Columbia as an institution, and nearly all Columbians rallied to the Union cause. President Charles King became one of the city’s most active prowar speakers. One of his sons would die in battle. In May 1861, a month after the surrender of Fort Sumter, Columbia held a flag-raising ceremony, with Major Robert Anderson, the federal commander at the fort, the main speaker. (Anderson was delayed in arriving and a student quipped that perhaps he was more adept at hauling down a flag than raising it – for which King sternly rebuked him.) King and Fish also spoke at the ceremony. Then the entire throng of faculty, students, administrators, and guests (including “ladies ... in great numbers”), sang the Star Spangled Banner. Fish helped to organize a giant patriotic rally in Union Square, out of which emerged the

Union Defense Committee, which he chaired. Strong helped to sponsor a contingent of troops. In July, Columbia conferred an honorary degree on Abraham Lincoln.⁶⁵

The speeches at Columbia's flag-raising ceremony said nothing about slavery or emancipation. But before long, this would change. In March 1862, King took part in a large meeting at Cooper Union to pressure the Lincoln administration to support emancipation. That July, at another mass meeting, he called for the war to be conducted "in its fiercest form," with "no talk of compromise or negotiation." So closely associated with the war effort had Columbia become that the college became a target during the New York City draft riots of July 1863. After burning the Colored Orphan Asylum, located about ten blocks south of Columbia on Fifth Avenue, (the College had moved uptown in the late 1850s) the mob entered the college grounds. It was determined to burn King's house "as he was rich, and a decided republican," according to Dr. John Torrey, a Columbia trustee who witnessed these events. King and his family were out of town, spending the summer in Newport. (They had become immensely rich in 1859 upon the death of his wife's father, the wealthy merchant Nicholas Low.) Someone hurriedly called for "one or two Catholic priests," who persuaded the mob to disperse, telling them that King was kind to the local poor. Later that year the trustees awarded Dr. Torrey 75 dollars "for expenses incurred by him in protecting the College buildings in the riots."⁶⁶

Less than a year later, in March 1864, King gave an impassioned speech at a ceremony marking the departure for the South of a black regiment raised in New York. Addressing the troops as "fellow-countrymen," he proclaimed, "when you put on the

uniform and swear allegiance to the standard of the Union, you stand emancipated, regenerated and disenthralled; the peer of the proudest soldier in the land.” In the presence of thousands of spectators, he presented the black soldiers with a regimental flag. This was among King’s final acts as Columbia president.⁶⁷

The organization of black regiments had been funded by the Union League Club, founded in 1863 to unite the city’s pro-war business and professional elite in support of a vigorous prosecution of the war. Among its founders were prominent Columbians, including King, Fish, Fish’s nemesis Beekman, Strong, and Samuel B. Ruggles, Strong’s father-in-law, a major New York business leader, and a trustee of the college. Of the approximately 850 persons who joined the Union League by the end of the Civil War, approximately 50 had a direct connection to Columbia and P and S as officers, faculty, or graduates. George Templeton Strong also served as treasurer of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, which organized assistance to wounded soldiers. Strong and other members of New York’s elite saw these organizations as a way of creating a morally coherent postwar society, counteracting the disruptive tendencies of universal suffrage, and teaching younger members of the elite their social responsibilities. But the war also radicalized him with respect to slavery. Strong now declared that future generations would regard John Brown as “the hero or representative man of this struggle.” “The change of opinion on this slavery question since 1860,” he wrote in 1864, “is a great historical fact.... God pardon our blindness of three years ago.”⁶⁸

Closely connected with the Union League was the Loyal Publication Society, founded in February 1863 to counteract antiwar propaganda being circulated in the city. By the end of the war it had published 90 pamphlets devoted to bolstering Union morale, reelecting Lincoln, and defending emancipation. Charles King was the group's first president, and a number of Columbians wrote for the Society. One was Professor of Greek and Latin Languages Henry Drisler, who published a lengthy pamphlet refuting Biblical defenses of slavery recently elaborated by Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont.⁶⁹

In 1864, King was succeeded as head of the Loyal Publication Society by Francis Lieber, one of Columbia's most distinguished professors. A Prussian who fled to avoid political persecution and arrived in the United States in 1827, Lieber was a bundle of contradictions. Privately, he despised slavery – it was “abominable in every respect,” he wrote in his diary in 1836. But as a professor at the University of South Carolina from 1835 until 1857, when he became Professor of History and Political Science at Columbia, he not only remained silent about the institution, but bought and sold household slaves. In his diary, he felt compelled to explain “the reasons why we bought them,” including that slaves were treated better by their owners than by those who hired them, and “we believe it will be cheaper for us.” In an article published in a Boston newspaper in 1851, however, Lieber ridiculed the idea of innate white superiority. “Superiority of the white race! Since when? ... What was he doing when civilization had made great progress in India, in literature, architecture and the useful arts?”⁷⁰

Once he arrived at Columbia, Lieber became a public critic of slavery (although his history course on the eve of the conflict seems to have made no mention of the institution). Lieber had sons fighting on both sides in the Civil War. An extreme nationalist, his wartime writings pilloried the South and defended every action of the federal government. It was Lieber who traveled to Washington in 1861 to deliver Lincoln's honorary degree. He quickly became a legal adviser to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Attorney General Edward Bates. Before the end of 1861 he was insisting that "all negroes coming into our [army] lines are free." The following year he urged the arming of black troops and informed Bates that the Supreme Court had been mistaken in Dred Scott and free blacks must be considered citizens of the United States. He wrote a new military code, issued in 1863, that became the foundation of the later Geneva conventions. It established humane standards for the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war, prohibited torture, and defended emancipation as a legitimate war measure, but also insisted that the survival of the nation was the paramount value and all other rules must be subordinate to it.⁷¹

Along with King, Lieber was the most outspoken prowar Columbian. He exulted over the presentation of colors to the black troops in 1864. "There were drawn up in line over a thousand armed negroes," he wrote to his long-time acquaintance Charles Sumner, "where but yesterday they were literally hunted down like rats. It was one of the greatest days of our history." By 1865, in a Loyal Publication Society pamphlet, Lieber proposed

a series of constitutional amendments to make irrevocable the end of slavery, the supremacy of the nation over the states, and the punishment of treason.⁷²

Not all Columbians were pro-Union. Writing from England, former newspaper editor John L. O'Sullivan condemned the war effort, insisting that southerners had as much right to choose a new form of government as the authors of the Declaration of Independence. (Lieber responded with a Loyal Publication Society pamphlet denouncing the comparison of Confederates with the patriots of 1776.) John Slidell, Class of 1810, became a leading Louisiana secessionist and Confederate commissioner to France. Richard Sears McCulloh, Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, who had been born in Baltimore and studied at Princeton, resigned in 1863 and departed for Richmond, where he experimented with chemical weapons for the Confederate war effort. "I shall ever cherish the kindest remembrances of the trustees, faculty and students of Columbia College," he wrote in his letter of resignation. The feeling was not mutual. The trustees not only expelled McCulloh for having "allied himself to those now in rebellion," but ordered that his name "be stricken from the list of Professors of this College." One trustee, William Betts, opposed the resolution, "true to his rebel sympathies" according to Strong.⁷³

Since Columbia essentially had no southern undergraduates it did not supply many soldiers to the southern army, unlike, for example, Princeton, where dozens of students resigned in 1861 to fight for the Confederacy. But despite President King's strong prowar position, the College did not encourage Columbia undergraduates to join the

Union army, and resisted calls from students to provide military training and to allow them to suspend their studies to fight. A few students did leave for the army. One, John Hone, who defied an order by President King not to leave, never completed his degree; in 1894, the College awarded it to him (although he failed to turn up at Commencement). Overall, few Columbia students or graduates decided to enlist. The classes of 1861 through 1864 graduated 167 young men; of these 16 served in the war. The number was unusually small compared with other northern colleges. Fewer than a dozen alumni were killed in the war. This is probably why, unlike Harvard and other peer institutions, Columbia has no memorial to its Civil War soldiers. One trustee enlisted in the army – John Jacob Astor, Jr.⁷⁴

In March 1864, Charles King resigned as Columbia's president. Strong, who had struggled without success to get the trustees to modernize the curriculum, did not think much of King's tenure. "The College has been debilitated for nearly forty years, perhaps longer" he mused, "from the fact that its presidents have not been chosen for fitness or from interest in the cause of education ... but because they were excellent persons in want of a situation." King's successor was Frederick A. P. Barnard. Like Francis Lieber, Barnard, a native of Massachusetts, had long taught in the South; indeed his most recent academic post had been chancellor of the University of Mississippi. There, while an outspoken Unionist, he had proclaimed himself a "Southron" and purchased slaves. Barnard became embroiled in controversy in 1859 when, over the objections of faculty members, he expelled a student who had raped one of the female slaves who worked in

Barnard's home. Since evidence for the assault came from the account of a male slave, Barnard was accused of convicting a student on slave testimony and said to be "unsound on the slavery question" (which he vehemently denied). He received support from Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, a university trustee. "No man strikes my negro that I do not hear his story," Thompson wrote to Barnard. "No man has a right to touch him or her without my consent." After an investigation, the trustees gave Barnard a vote of confidence.⁷⁵

When the war broke out, nearly all the students at Ole Miss enlisted in the Confederate army. Barnard resigned and, declining an offer from Jefferson Davis of a position in the Confederate government, eventually made his way to the North. In January 1863, he published in the New York Tribune a "Letter to the President of the United States, by a Refugee," in which he denounced slavery as a "relic of primitive barbarism," but spent most of his space warning of a fifth column in the North—traitors who posed the real danger to the war effort.⁷⁶

Barnard did not share King's strong hatred of slavery, nor the commitment he had developed during the war to improving the condition of blacks. He would later attempt, unsuccessfully, to persuade the faculty to admit women to Columbia College, but showed no interest in enrolling blacks. John W. Burgess, the dominant voice on the faculty (and later an architect, along with Professor of History William A. Dunning, of a strongly racist account of the Reconstruction era) steadfastly opposed admitting black students. Thus, Columbia lagged behind its peers. Yale awarded its first degree to a black student

in 1857. Several black students attended Harvard in the 1860s; the first to receive a B. A. there was Richard T. Greener, in 1870. Columbia's first black undergraduate was James Priest, a native not of the United States but of Liberia, who graduated from the recently-established School of Mines in 1877. In that year, the faculty of P and S., now Columbia's medical school, reaffirmed the prewar policy of not admitting black students. "This does not speak well for the democratic principles of the professors," commented the College publication Cap and Gown. In 1896 a black student, James Dickson Carr, received a law degree. Not until 1908 did the first black student earn a B. A. from Columbia College. This was Pixley ka Ikasa Seme, of South Africa. He later studied law at Oxford, returned to South Africa, and became a founder of the African National Congress.⁷⁷

In the first half of the twentieth century, Columbia's professional and graduate schools would train numerous black lawyers, scientists, and educators. A survey of "Negro leaders" in the professions published in 1935 found that Columbia ranked second to the University of Chicago as the place where they received degrees. But in 1939 there was only one black student at P and S. And the number of black undergraduates remained tiny. As late as 1963, the graduating class of over 600 young men (of which I was one) included only three black Americans and one South African. Not until 1966 did Columbia College have more than twenty black students enrolled at one time, and in that year the number of black faculty members on the Morningside campus could be counted on one hand.⁷⁸

It would take a social revolution in the country and an unprecedented crisis on the campus itself for Columbia finally to move beyond the long history of involvement with slavery and racism, and toward becoming the more diverse, more inclusive institution it is today.

NOTES

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When not otherwise footnoted, information about slaveholding and slave trading by King's and Columbia graduates, benefactors, and officers, as well as their years of graduation from the College and/or terms of service to it, derives from the following sources: the manuscript U. S. Census (accessed through AncestryLibrary.com); the online Slave Voyages database; Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America (4 vols.: Washington, 1932), 3: 462-512; Harry B. Yoshpe, "Record of Slave Manumissions in New York During the Colonial and Early National Periods," Journal of Negro History, 26 (January, 1941), 78-107; Yoshpe, "Record of Slave Manumissions in Albany, 1800-28," Journal of Negro History, 26 (October 1941), 499-522; and Milton H. Thomas, Columbia University Officers and Alumni 1754-1857 (New York, 1936).

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