OUR PAST ENGAGED:
FOUR TURNING POINTS IN
COLUMBIA’S HISTORY

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KENNETH T. JACKSON
THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CITY:
COLUMBIA AND NEW YORK FROM THE CIVIL WAR
TO THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Alan Brinkley, Provost and Allan Nevins Professor of History

Introduction to the Proceedings

Alan Brinkley: I'm Alan Brinkley. I'm the provost at Columbia. I'm also a member of the Department of History, and in fact am one of the speakers in this series. But I'm here tonight to introduce Bob McCaughey, the sort of guiding spirit behind not just this series of lectures but the larger appreciation of Columbia's history, in this our 250th year. Bob, of course, is the author of the extraordinary history of Columbia, Stand Columbia, which was published this fall and has been a remarkable success, particularly among the Columbia community. And it was his idea to organize this lecture series. And so we're very grateful to him, both for the book and for all of his other efforts to help us focus on the history of this great university.

Universities, of course, are devoted to, among other things, the study of history. And so it's very appropriate that we spend at least a little of our attention studying our own history. And we begin that tonight.

So with great pleasure I introduce Bob McCaughey, who will then introduce tonight's speakers. Thanks very much.
Robert McCaughey, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of History, Barnard College

Welcome and Introduction

Robert McCaughey: It was appropriate to have the provost introduce the proceedings. This is one of his buildings, but it also happens to be appropriate in the sense that Provost Brinkley will be leading . . . be the principal speaker at the second of this series of four talks next Tuesday, April 13, talking about Columbia at midcentury. Intellectual capital of the nation? . . . question mark. The question mark is meant to suggest in some form of punctuation the way in which we hope to approach this task of engaging the past . . . a series of questions about the past that we can converse about. Casey Blake, professor of American studies and American history, will be one of the respondents, and so will Fritz Stern, provost emeritus of the University and a long-standing member of the history department, and a contemporary of some of the figures when he was a young assistant professor here in the 1950s.

That will be followed a week later by Professor Rosalind Rosenberg of the Barnard history department, whose talk will be titled "Beyond the Knickerbockers: Inclusiveness at Columbia." That doesn't have a question mark, but I think the talk will raise questions about that. Responding to her will be Gillian Lindt, professor emerita of religion and once dean of the graduate school here, and Monica Miller, an assistant professor of English and Pan-African studies at Barnard.

And then the last of the talks I will be delivering on April 27, "Columbia '68: A Chapter in the History of Student Power." And the respondents there will be three in number, who by my calculations spread their Columbia connections over nine genera . . . over nine decades, nine generations would be pushing it, nine decades. Ted de Bary, John Mitchell Mason professor emeritus and previous provost here at the University; Lewis Cole, professor of film studies in the School of the Arts; and Jacqueline Russo, a graduating senior this year at Columbia College, 2004.

Before introducing the keynote speaker tonight, I'd like to introduce the two respondents. They are both New Yorkers, and both—luck would have it—are Columbians. Evan Cornog is associate professor of journalism and the editor of the Columbia Journalism Review. He earned his PhD in history from Columbia some years back. Eric McKittrick was one of his principal advisors. Out of that dissertation work came a biography of Dewitt Clinton, United States senator, governor of New York, mayor of New York City, and prime mover behind the Erie Canal. He was also the first graduate of the reconstituted Columbia College, class of 1786. It was said that he was one of the most famous of Columbia graduates. Indeed Nicholas Murray
Butler—who became a member of the class of 1882—contended he was the only famous Columbia graduate until the class of 1882. In addition to his work on Dewitt Clinton, Evan has published an illustrated history of presidential elections, and he has a forthcoming history on the power of the story, how the crafted presidential narrative has determined political success.

Michael Wallace—Mike Wallace—has an MA and a PhD from Columbia, where he was a student of Richard Hofstadter’s during Professor Hofstadter’s last years. He is presently a member of the history department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice—John Jay, another good Columbia name—as well as a member of the graduate faculties at CUNY. He's published widely and indeed diversely. A book on American violence was coedited with his sponsor, Richard Hofstadter, in 1970. He's also written on the party system in the early nineteenth century, and then—as many of us have had occasion to read and benefit from—is the coauthor of *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. We're all waiting for the next volume. But the first volume was signalized by winning the Nobel . . . excuse me, the Pulitzer Prize for the year 2000. The Nobel Prize went to Professor Jackson for something else. Mike has also published *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays in American Memory*. Also his oral history of his dealings with the Columbia ’68 troubles—the oral history taken twenty years after the fact—is one of the great stories, looking back, to talk about American memory of what went on during those crazy days.

And now to the main speaker. Kenneth Jackson is the Jacques Barzun Professor of History and Social Science He's completing a term as president of the New-York Historical Society. He is not a Columbia-trained historian, but received his education at Memphis State, and then the University of Chicago. And somewhere tucked in between those a stint in the United States Air Force. He came to Columbia—but who's counting—in 1968, 36 years ago. He's been teaching, pretty much in a rut since then, urban history; and then an equal passion, although somewhat more of a private story, military history. Ken's published widely. *Ku Klux Klan in the City* came out of his dissertation work at the University of Chicago and was published in 1967. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* was published in 1985, and transformed the way in which urban history is written, and, I hope, read. It won the Bancroft and Parkman prizes the same year. He's also the editor—chief editor—of the *Encyclopedia of New York City*, which came in 1995—some 4,300 entries on the City of New York—and won a terrific short piece on Columbia University done by Harold Wexler.

Ken has chosen to talk about the University and the city, from the Civil War to the Progressive Era. And to the extent that the purpose of these talks is to engage us in a series of considerations of historical questions that have ongoing relevance, where
better to start than with a consideration of Columbia's long, intricate, and intimate connection with the City of New York? Professor Jackson.

Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor in History and the Social Sciences

Celebrating 250 Years

Kenneth T. Jackson: Thank you, Bob. It's been my pleasure to speak in this room several times, but it's always intimidating, both because of its magnificent space but I think also because of the words on the south side of the building: "Founded as King's College in the Province of New York in the reign of King George II." We are gathered, as Bob said, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Columbia. And I think there's much to celebrate . . . in some ways just longevity. In 1754, when this institution began, there was no such place as the United States. George Washington was an unknown young man from somewhere in Virginia. Washington, D.C. was an uninhabited—some would say uninhabitable—swamp. Alexander Hamilton was not born yet. St. Paul's Chapel—down in Lower Manhattan, adjacent to the World Trade Center, which is the oldest continuously operating building or church in Manhattan—had not been built yet. There was no such thing as a grid system in New York City, no such thing as a police force, no public water system, no public transit. Nobody but locals had ever heard of Lexington and Concord or Bunker Hill or Paul Revere. So 250 years is a long, long time. And the Columbia 250 Committee has worked hard with the assistance of many people like Roger Lehecka and Ember Deitz and others to make much of this achievement and this survival. After all, most institutions in 1754 have long since ceased to exist. And similarly most institutions that exist today can not trace their lineage back 250 years.

We've tried to do many things to call attention to the 250th anniversary, including this lecture series: a series of academic symposia on topics of surpassing significance. This fall, for example, we're having one on the frontiers of creativity—and in this case not science so much as music and art and literature, composers and the visual arts—as well as on the twenty-first-century city.

We had made a film—some of you may have been fortunate enough to see—directed and produced by Ric Burns, which was shown on PBS, and which is shown often in alumni gatherings around the country. We had a very important role in renovating the subway entrances at 103rd and 110th and 116th and 125th streets. Columbia
put up some of the money for that as part of its 250th celebration, and that subway entrance is really our front door.

William Ted de Bary has put together a wonderful compilation of achievements by Columbia faculty and researchers over the years called "Living Legacies" that many of you have read in Columbia Magazine. We're proud of Bob McCaughey's book, Stand Columbia—which believe it or not is the first general interpretive history of this institution—and you do not have to read very far into the book to realize that he is independent of judgment, and that this is not a filiopietistic effort.

We had a rock concert out here on the campus. I was too old to even know that they were doing, but I did notice that there were like 20,000 people on the campus, and they enjoyed it rather more than I did. We're going to have a major party for the neighborhood in the fall. We've issued a postcard with Columbia on it. We had a big celebration in Lower Manhattan with Trinity Church—which of course founded Columbia—and then a big luncheon where Ric Burns spoke in the Regent Wall Street. And we'll conclude, among other things, with the homecoming with Princeton on October the second where we are promising a blowout victory. But most importantly we celebrate Columbia and what it's achieved and what it will achieve. This university has become one of the world's great centers of higher education, and has brought together many of the greatest minds on the planet. Bob I guess mentioned accidentally the Nobel Prize. Well, sixty winners of the Nobel Prize have either studied or taught at this institution, just as one example.

**Tonight's Focus**

My focus tonight is, as was said, not only on the period between the Civil War and the Progressive Era, but especially the city and the University. Those years were times of enormous change and accomplishment for the University. They are detailed in Professor McCaughey's book. In fact, the other night as I was preparing for this speech and had been reading the book for hours, Barbara said, "I have an idea. Why don't you ask Bob to give the speech?" I said that was a great idea but it was too late. So he's going to listen to it and critique it.

But anyway, just to sum up the biggest changes . . . In 1854, a century after this institution was founded, it was a small place, and yet it had emerged by 1920 as what Bob called "the first multiversity in the world." There was a name change in 1896—from Columbia College in the City of New York to Columbia University in the City of New York—which reflected the enormous changes in the focus of the University. In fact, it was becoming a university: the School of Mines, the School of Law, the Faculty of Political Science, and Pure Science, and Philosophy, and Applied
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Sciences, the movement of Teachers' College, the creation of Barnard, the closer relationship with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Architecture School, and so on and so forth. Or, as Bob said, "Columbia became today's Columbia in the 1890s."

Another major change for Columbia in those years between the Civil War and the Progressive Era was of course the move uptown. From 1750 . . . well actually when Columbia first started it was a Trinity space literally right across the street from Rector, from where Alexander Hamilton is buried. But from 1760 until 1857 Columbia was in a building—I think called College Hall—which was on Park Place, just about a mile from the Battery in Lower Manhattan. And then in 1857 it moves uptown—to what was then defined as uptown—to Forty-ninth Street between Madison and Park. And then of course the shift to Morningside Heights, a place when the institution first moved . . . it was empty, as you can see when Low Library is going up. And then you can see the surrounding area and there are virtually no buildings and no people, because there was no way to get here. The subway opens in 1904. This is the first subway in New York City. It comes up the east side, hangs a left at Forty-second Street, and then follows Broadway. It's only later that they extend that east-side line up Lexington Avenue and change the name to the 4, 5, 6, and then run the Broadway line down below Forty-second Street. And then what used to be the S and the snake, they cut that off and make that the shuttle. But anyway, Columbia sort of becomes part of the city, or this region does, after 1904.

And Bob also talks about a third major change at Columbia in these years, and he called it sort of the shift in power . . . the power structure toward the faculty. I sort of never thought that until I had another kind of a job, where I learned how fortunate the faculty is. But this shift, he says, relates both in the rise in the number of the faculty, the expectations about holding PhDs and being a scholar of one kind or another, and the increasing reliance on outside evaluations rather than inside evaluations for promotion and tenure.

And we might say a fourth major change might be the emergence of exceptional leadership at the top. Frederick Barnard, Seth Low—who gave this building—and Nicholas Murray Butler, who was the best-known university president of the first half of the twentieth century, and if you'd ask him, no doubt the best university president of the first half of the twentieth century.

My job this evening, I think, is not to tell you what you can learn more effectively from Stand Columbia but rather to think about this university in relation to the city. And I want to leave time for you to comment on these issues, and so we'll try to be very brief, and I've got my watch here.
Columbia Didn't Keep Pace

But let me focus on three issues that we might take as criticisms or hypotheses or just issues to discuss. Firstly, it seems to me that for large periods of its history Columbia did not keep pace with New York City. Let's just consider this: In 1754 when Columbia was founded as King's College, New York was not a very impressive place by world standards, or maybe even by national standards, you know. We didn't have an official census but let's call it 15,000 or so people, certainly a second tier place in the larger British Empire, and not even in the same ballpark as London. During the American Revolution, as you know, because of its geographical location the British made New York the focus of their effort and their attention. They looked at the map. They passed over Boston, which they could've returned to after Bunker Hill. They knew Virginia was large. But they looked at the map and they saw New York harbor, they saw the Hudson River going into the interior, and they made a very conscious and deliberate and intelligent decision that New York was the key to the American Revolution. And it was the headquarters city all through the seven years of the war.

But we paid a price. The city was burned in 1776, maybe by Nathan Hale, maybe not, but very destructive, and again in 1778. So by 1784, when King's College was rechartered as Columbia, the city was not a very impressive place. It was concentrated below Fulton Street, in many ways even farther south than that. You think about what happened in New York between 1784 and Columbia's centennial in 1854. By 1854 New York was the unrivaled metropolis of the Western Hemisphere, having surpassed not only Boston and Philadelphia easily by that time but Mexico City and other places in South America as well. It was easily the most important port in the Western Hemisphere, and by some measures the most important port in the world. The Erie Canal had opened in 1825 so that New York had become the classic transportation break, meaning that goods coming down the Erie Canal on these small boats could not then go to Liverpool on those same boats. They had to be unloaded... goods had to be unloaded, and where but in New York?... usually on the Brooklyn docks. And so it took hundreds and thousands of men to unload and load. And that leaves the opportunity for wholesales and jobbers and banks and all manner of other institutions to grow up around them.

New York comes up with the then-unusual practice of regularly scheduled packet service, or the idea that the ship will sail on a schedule, which seems so normal to us. We at least hope if we go to the airport that the plane will leave more or less when they say it will, and not whether the captain's got a belly ache or the plane's only a third full or the weather's not great. But that's the way it used to be. The captain might tell you anything—"Yes, we'll sail next Tuesday if that's what you like"—but in fact that was just sort of a wish and not a promise. Why would anybody
want to set sail with a half-empty ship to go all the way to Liverpool and endure the hardships of a North Atlantic crossing? How could you set sail if you didn't have a crew? How could you set sail if the weather wasn't good? How could you have set sail before you'd really had enough of wine, women, and song? But in New York, early in 1818, the Black Ball Line pioneered the concept. If we say we sail at ten o'clock on such-and-such a day, we sail at ten. And that was one of the many reasons why New York gets a leg up on Philadelphia and Boston and its competitors, and so it grows.

By 1854 New York not only has a public transportation system, it has the best public-transport system in the world, having more or less invented the horse car . . . the horse-drawn streetcar.

There were big hotels in the city, by some measures the biggest hotels in the world, and Broadway was regularly compared with the grandest streets in London and Paris. The city may have had 800,000, 900,000 people if we count the immediately adjacent areas of Brooklyn. So it's no longer a second-tier city. It's rising up, not yet to compete with London and Paris and Tokyo, but nevertheless just below that level and clearly dominant in this hemisphere.

Columbia in some ways was fortunate because Trinity Church gave us 6 acres. Bob reports that this was the wealthiest college in the colonial period. But in 1854, a hundred years after its founding, Columbia has six faculty members and 140 students. And even in those years between 1860 and 1930 when New York goes on to become even more important . . . the center of probably world capitalism in 1917 during World War I when it takes over from London, the building of what becomes instantly the greatest subway system in the world in the early part of the twentieth century, the consolidation of the city in 1898 so that by 1900 the city has 3.4 million people, second only to London in all the world. In 1920 or 1930 it is the largest and richest city on Earth. Columbia does change between the Civil War and 1920, as I mentioned, but does it rise to preeminence, as the City of New York does? So my first point is it doesn't really track the city as we wish it had.

**Columbia Distances Itself from the City of New York**

Secondly I think is an attitudinal issue . . . not quite the same point but it seems to me that over the decades and in some way over the centuries Columbia has more often tried to distance itself from the City of New York than trying to embrace it. It's called Columbia University in the City of New York, and we don't call it Rice University in the City of Houston, or Harvard University in the City of Cambridge, so it is unusual. But as Tom Bender said, it's not really *of* the city, it was very much *in*
the city. And I think it's an interesting phenomenon. Bob McCaughey in his introduction mentioned the wonderful books that were written by the panelists on the stage. Mike Wallace's, for example, a magnificent history of Gotham up until 1898 that not only brings together—there are 10,000 books on New York City, more—but this really brings together all that scholarship into one volume or one very well-written volume.

And what's interesting is even in this superior book Mike Wallace can write a history of New York City with relatively little to say about Columbia. Indeed he has more entries on brothels than he does on Columbia. Now this being Sodom and Gomorrah you could argue that whorehouses are more important to the life of the city than the life of the mind, but I think it does say something about the city. Obviously not everyone shared that, especially a person like Seth Low, who had been the mayor of Brooklyn before he came to be president of Columbia and gave this building in memory of his father, I think, A. A. Low. And then Seth Low went on to become mayor of New York City, so clearly he had a very strong link to the city. But my . . . at least my question to the audience and to the panelists would be that for so long Columbia really wished it were in Hanover, New Hampshire, or if not in Hanover than maybe in Princeton or Ithaca, or perhaps even Cambridge or New Haven. After all, just following upon the European or especially the Cambridge and Oxford tradition of getting the university away from the city. In fact, as evidence of that, Columbia, as you know, even thought on several occasions—I mean by that the trustees thought on several occasions—of moving the institution . . . in the nineteenth century, and as late as the 1950s, thought about, "Well maybe we would just be better to pick it up, sell it off to somebody else and let's relocate in a more bucolic and peaceful and quiet and safe environment for scholarship."

In fact, even a little bit later than that we might say that some people had their doubts. William McGill, who was a New Yorker and who was head of the psychology department, he writes—and I'm quoting from Stand Columbia—he said—this is in 1964—"I thought the Upper West Side was deteriorating very rapidly, and I felt the problem at Columbia was not Columbia, but New York City, and that what I could do would be to sort of change my base completely and go west where I could get a fresh start." By the way he did, and then he came back to Columbia to be president in the 1970s, but really was not of the city but visiting here, and then of course retired back to California.

Or then, as George Rupp said—you know, talking about the tough place that we live in—he says, "The Columbia campus today runs little risk of being confused with its Ivy counterparts, much less a pricey spa. As befits its urban setting it is congested and noisy. Faculty learn to teach through sirens, jackhammers, and planes approaching LaGuardia, much as clergy preach through wailing babies. Newly arrived
students and not a few new faculty note the emphasis placed on the adjectival component of the tough love they sometimes encounter from library and custodial staff. Nor are those experiencing initiatory disorientation always assured understanding from on high. "If you want more structure," President Rupp informed a Columbia Spectator reporter voicing those concerns, "go to Amherst or Princeton." And as Bob says, "Warm and fuzzy it is not."

And finally I should just mention that Professor McCaughey could write Stand Columbia, an excellent, excellent book, without much reference to New York City. And Evan Cornog's book The Birth of Empire, about Dewitt Clinton—arguably the most important person, the most influential person ever to live in New York City, even more than Robert Moses or Fiorello LaGuardia, Andrew Haswell Green or Frederick Law Olmsted or Peter Stuyvesant or whomever—can write that without much reference to Columbia, except the Columbia commencement riot.

Diversity

Thirdly, and finally, I want to speak to the issue of diversity, what some people have called the gorgeous mosaic, others the melting pot, or simply call it discrimination. New York has not been in its history like other cities. As late as certainly World War II, I would say London could be described as British, Paris as French, Berlin as German, Copenhagen as Danish, Tokyo as Japanese. But what was New York? From the very beginning, when the Dutch established the settlement at the foot of Lower Manhattan, their idea was to make money. And because they wanted to make money they were less concerned with pure thoughts, pure actions, or who you were or where you were, as was often stated by the Dutch West India Company and sometimes its leaders. Even in the 1640s you can find quotations when there are fewer than 1,000 people in the city that there were more than a dozen—sometimes people say as many as 18—languages being spoken. In the nineteenth century, in connection with the Irish potato famine, New York gets huge numbers of Irish, more than Boston. At times it has more Irish people in New York than in Dublin. Germans . . . in the late nineteenth century it's said that Klein Deutschland—generally south of Fourteenth Street, east of Third—would've been the third largest city in the German Empire, had it been in the German Empire. Or in the early nineteenth century when New York had as many Italians as Naples. Or think especially of the Jews. A generation ago Moses Rischin wrote a book called The Promised City: New York's Jews . . . I want to say 1880 to 1920. The promised city was not Warsaw or Krakow or Berlin, and it was not Philadelphia or Boston or Chicago. Why do the Jews come to New York City in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century? And of course I'll follow that up with why do the Arabs come to New York City today? Did somebody forget to tell them it's the largest Jewish city in the world? But New York
has always been open, not easy, not kind, not considerate, not always polite, but offering you a chance. People in New York—like the Dutch in the 1620s—don't frankly give a damn about your religious beliefs, just can they work with you? So I think that's something that we celebrate about New York City, especially now, so that it's a world city today in the truest sense of the term, not just a world city in terms of its size or economic importance, but a world city in the sense that it's almost the world's second home, it's where every group has a presence.

I remember when we were doing the *Encyclopedia of New York City* we had an entry on every ethnic group, every ethnic group, I mean Estonians . . . I don't know if any are here? There are fewer Estonians than there are people on the Upper West Side, but there's an Estonian presence in New York. There's an Estonian house. Yes, now you can go to Los Angeles and count up the immigrants, or Vancouver or Toronto or Sydney, or Melbourne, but New York has every group, every single one.

What about Columbia? This institution in general—again not everyone—did not break ranks with other elite institutions and peer places. It adopted subtle and not so subtle ways of limiting or restricting the enrollment of certain groups so that we could have the so-called best people come here. And it was also difficult for many groups to gain entrance to the Columbia faculty. In 1854, for example, as Professor McCaughey tells us, 80 percent of the trustees were Episcopalian. And I want to say that it was not until the 1950s that we had a president that was not an Episcopalian. And by the way I'm wearing an Episcopalian tie right now, so I don't mean to say anything against Episcopalians, just to cover myself.

And I think that we should always be careful as historians not to judge people who lived in another time and place by our standards. You know . . . Abraham Lincoln as a raving racist, you know, when in his time in life he was considered so radical that half the South was willing to secede just on the basis of his election. So I don't want to do that. And it's of course true enough that all institutions like Columbia tended to discriminate, not just against Jews . . . we know about women, African Americans, and other groups.

But why couldn't Columbia have been different from Dartmouth and Princeton and Yale and Harvard? Could Columbia have been what its location allowed it to be, Columbia University in the City of New York? In other words, Columbia may have at least for a while missed an opportunity by not embracing the city in its diversity, as well as in its going back and forth. So the way Columbia finally did change . . . it may have been the intellectual center of the world, as Provost Alan Brinkley will be talking about next time, in part because let's say of a Jewish presence.
I wanted to leave you with those thoughts not because I intend them as statements of fact but of statements of argument, as a hypothesis. I don't want to end on a negative note. This institution is my life. And like tens of thousands of other people who have made their way to this campus—often through that 116th subway entrance—Columbia allowed me to become all that I could be. And so I salute it on its 250th anniversary, on its 250 years of service, and am only sorry that I'm not going to be here to experience its achievements and conquests in the centuries to come.

I love the grittiness of the city, and I am proud that I have been here and been able to be here for so long. And so I thank you for coming to help us join the 250th celebration. And I now turn it over to our commentators.

Robert McCaughey Passes the Mike

Robert McCaughey: What we hope to do is to hear from our two respondents—there may be some "to-ing" and "fro-ing" as a result of that with the main speaker, and sometimes even with the moderator—and then open up the discussion to the audience. And we have microphones that may facilitate that. I'm going to start on the basis of alphabetization of last name, and height, with Evan Cornog to offer the first response.

Evan Cornog, Associate Dean, School of Journalism, Columbia University (GSAS 1996)

Evan Cornog Responds to Ken Jackson

Evan Cornog: Thanks, Bob. Well, Ken, you know how much I share your love for both the institution of Columbia and particularly for the City of New York and all the possibilities it offers to everybody who lives here. But I want to kind of question a little bit the premise that this could have been a happier marriage than it was. And I'm going to start by something that I came across recently that may seem at first not particularly relevant, but I hope comes back to the point, and that's writing about the early years of the Vietnam War. In the 1960s, the journalist David Halberstam described how American advisors to the South Vietnamese army tried to
encourage that army's officers to set an example for their troops and leading them into battle rather than sending them out on their own while remaining ensconced in their offices. And Halberstam writes, "They were trying to persuade an inflexible military ally with very little political or social sense about its own people to do what the Americans knew must be done. But this would force the Vietnamese officers to give up the very things that really mattered to them and that motivated them in the first place. How could anyone make the Vietnamese officers see, almost overnight, that the purpose of promotion was not primarily to separate them from the misery whence they came, but to get them to inspire or lead others?"

And Ken, you suggested in your talk that the University had lagged behind the city and walled itself off, either literally or figuratively, and that this was a lost opportunity for greatness. Or at least I think that was part of what you were saying. But I wonder whether universities in cities are so obviously allied as that implies. We at Columbia like to think that we are not a kind of typical ivory-tower institution and that that stereotype doesn't apply to us, but the very nature of academic work means that much of what our faculties do is distant from the lives and concerns of those outside the academy. All you have to do is look at the kind of annual New York Times article on the MLA convention, sort of mocking the titles of the various discussions, to know that that's a world that seems very distant even to a sophisticated paper like the Times. And Bob's book makes it clear that distance from the populous was something often prized by the founders and early leaders of King's College. Could it be that the distance that has existed, and still exists, is a version of the attitude of those South Vietnamese lieutenants and captains? In other words, to become really integrated into the life of the city would too many people have to give up the very honors and privileges they struggled so hard to attain? Or to ask this another way, was the goal Ken is speaking of positively—a closer relationship between town and gown—a goal that goes against something fundamental in universities?

Michael Wallace, Professor of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY (Columbia College 1964, GSAS 1973)

Mike Wallace Responds to Ken Jackson

Michael Wallace: Okay, I'm going to stretch my legs here. First I want to speak to Ken's notion about the number of references to Columbia vis-a-vis brothels in New York City. It's actually worse than he points out. Because at least if memory serves
one of my references to Columbia was about the intense proximity of brothels to the then all-male environment of Columbia down on Lower Manhattan. So it may be that Columbia was even a secondary consideration in one of its mentions.

But I think his larger point is well taken, and I'd like to speak to it, and perhaps try to come at the issues he poses about the relationship between the city and the University in a somewhat different fashion.

Let me start with an argument that in fact is in the same universe as Ken's—and that's Professor Thomas Bender's argument in his wonderful book New York Intellect—that Columbia in the era between the Civil and the First World War was, as per its official name inscribed above, in but perhaps not of the City of New York. That argument makes a great deal of sense, especially given his primary concern, which was tracking the history of Gotham's intellectual life. Certainly most would agree that the college was at best a drowsy backwater for much of that period, given over largely to credentialing an ever-shrinking sliver of the city's upper class. But the key story of these decades is the rise of the University. And while Bender's reservations about the quantity and quality of the transformed institution's interventions in metropolitan intellectual life, though debatable, have force and merit, expanding his argument beyond its purview to suggest a massive disconnect between the city and the University would, I think, be misleading.

It's not just that there were manifold points of contact between the two so much as in this era both were equally and interlockingly transformed by several larger developments, including among them the rise of a science-based industrialization—that nexus of demographic and political agglomerating that we shorthand as urbanization—and most dramatically, the rise of corporate capitalism.

From at least the 1880s the nation's small-scale competitive capitalist economy was reworked crucially by the agency of New York's investment banking community—J. P. Morgan et al—until by the end of the century a sweeping series of mergers had generated a new political-economic universe of giant firms, many of them headquartered here in the metropolis. This growing centralization and complexity of the national economy, among other factors, summoned into being a substantially novel class of metropolitan professionals and managers to run corporations and mercantile firms and to provide the skilled intellectual labor in law, accounting, architecture, engineering, etcetera, required to run the apparatus. There were a variety of crucibles for this new class—notably the host of professional associations that now arrived with a rush—but professional schools were arguably foremost. The remaking of Columbia's law school was part of this movement, as legal firms expanded dramatically in size, and expectations of the expertise required to handle the complicated affairs of the new nationally oriented corporations—indeed to create
them—expanded dramatically. Trustee George Templeton Strong was an early advocate of replacing the apprenticeship system with a law-school education, and in turn graduates like William Nelson Cromwell went on to establish newly scaled corporate law firms like Sullivan and Cromwell, which J. P. Morgan worked with in creating United States Steel in 1901. These outfits, in turn—notably at Paul Cravath’s shop—placed an ever greater emphasis on obtaining law degrees as a requirement for recruitment.

Other professional schools flowered at Columbia—and elsewhere of course—in engineering, in business, in medicine, in journalism, in teaching, often urged on by businessmen in these fields, like Pulitzer or Hepburn. And under presidents Low and Butler, the University itself embraced the logic and style of the merger movement, with its conviction that consolidation and expansion brought greater rationality, efficiency, economies of scale, marketplace power, and cultural authority; the latter invariably underscored by being housed in Roman imperial structures turned out by corporate architects such as McKim, Mead, and White. Think the consolidation and housing of the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the New York Stock Exchange.

The move to Morningside was in part a flight to a pristine Acropolis and thus could be said to be disconnecting from downtown. But it was also a staging area in which there was space to assemble constituent parts and bring them together into a formidable phalanx; the whole to be governed—certainly in Butler’s eye—as in the case of a large business corporation downtown.

There were of course cultural dimensions to all of this, and this is at the heart of the discussion that Ken has raised about the inclusionary or exclusionary nature of Columbia in this period. But again I think it helps if we expand the conversation to focus on the larger transformations that were underway, of which both metropolitan and university developments were but a subset.

The corporate elite, and the newly expanded and fortified out rigor professional and managerial class sought to define its distinctive standing and authority in part through how it constituted itself and in part by whom it excluded. The city's elite in the 1880s and 1890s was, on the one hand, relatively more cosmopolitan now, sending its youth for class credentialing—getting that requisite mix of classics, sports, social graces, habits of command, and taste for public service—to preparatory schools and increasingly colleges more in Boston's orbit than in Manhattan's. Roosevelts and Fishes now swam off to Harvard and Yale to mix with wealthy young men from around the country with whom they would join in owning and managing the corporate economy. But the still overwhelmingly Anglo-Protestant community was also newly provincial, reversing the detente it had established with
German Jewry—now tainted by association with the newly arrived Eastern Europeans—and establishing a regime of social exclusion, which in turn fostered economic segregation. If you didn’t accumulate the old-boy network connections you in fact had a much greater degree of difficulty getting into the banks, corporations, and law firms, which, consequently, remained largely through this era Protestant enclaves. In turn it sort of shuttled ambitious Jews off into those industries which they either had already controlled—merchandising or one wing of investment banking—or fields newly opened to entrepreneurial innovation, like entertainment and mass communication.

It's not surprising that Columbia found itself caught up in this dilemma, as—indeed Ken suggests—other institutions throughout certainly the northeast did as well. To some extent I think the problem for Columbia was made particularly acute by its ambition again of relationship with the city, as to the kinds of people it was going to train and where they were going to go. The notion was that graduates of Columbia were going to staff the highest echelons of the various city triangles, the apexes, both in law and in banking and in culture, and in teaching for instance as well. So they would be the leaders of the lead institutions. Whereas places like NYU and then later CCNY were relegated to providing the personnel for middle and lower range, both in law firms and in classrooms and the rest. Given that in fact the apex was guarded now more rigorously against Jewish entrants, to turn out Jews from here—the same problem that they confronted in the efforts that many, in fact, at Columbia hoped to do by expanding and opening their ranks to women, at a time when women were clearly persona non grata in the very destinations to which they were planning on sending their students—was a difficult problem. And as Professor McCaughey has in fact argued, I think correctly, that in some respects, in fact, Columbia did a great deal better than many of its peers, although what was it? . . . 44 percent of the student body being Jewish in 1917—when the efforts to impose a quota went into effect—dropped dramatically to about 40 after. So that still leaves in fact a substantial . . . 22, that still leaves a substantial percentage of Jewish students, given the vision of the future.

Last point . . . though, I think . . . indeed to end on a more positive note, the faculty was itself a complex body in this era. It's true that many on the staff saw their role . . . as many of the new intellectuals and professionals as, you know, serving and accommodating the corporate order, at being traditional in their cultural approach to things. But there is a reason that students like Matthew Josephson and Randolph Bourne and Max Eastman—who later remembered that in this era ideas were sprouting up through the bricks at Columbia—were drawn here. This was, after all, home to the likes of Dewey, Robinson, Matthews, and Beard. And in particular I would note a clutch of German-Jewish intellectuals, a variety of them people who, like Joel Spingarn, were involved directly in the formation and running of the NAACP.
and were involved in black-Jewish relationships in the city. But my favorite . . . and I'll end with . . . just reminding you of his presence here, was the peerless Franz Boas, who—although it's true there were colleagues who passed through Columbia's halls, like Henry Fairfield Osborne, or like Thorndike, who in fact trafficked with the new eugenics movement which had at its roots the notion that there was a fixed hierarchy of races and in fact it ran from Episcopalians on down to blacks, Jews, and then, you know, darkest savagery below that—that Boas from the beginning set himself to undermine the scientific basis for racism. And his first efforts couldn't have been more directly involved in the city. In 1908 he embarked on a three-year project that involved working with Eastern-European and other immigrants who had come through Ellis Island and were in the New York City public school systems where he found them. And this was somewhat retrograde, but at the time this was where anthropology was at . . . measuring their skulls. This was basically something that was normally used to prove inferior intelligence of whomever you wanted to prove had inferior intelligence. You came up with an index of the relationship between the brow and the jaw that made your group come out on top, and the others kind of fall by the wayside. He in fact set himself a different task, which was to notice that the distinction between the skull index—and a critical one—between the parents and the children who had grown up in New York City was different, that in fact the skulls here were getting larger. This was thought to be an impossibility because in fact races were fixed. By proving the physical malleability in these new surrounds, in fact he opened the possibility of other kinds of influences transforming the populous.

Now in fact he very quickly got much more sophisticated than that and introduced the notion that in fact it was culture, not biology, that was the critical constitutive factor of so-called racial, now ethnic, identities. And it was from his work and those of his followers of the next twenty, thirty years—many of them in fact famous Columbia-trained students of his—that we entered an entirely new universe . . . underpinning of a whole different attitude towards immigration, towards tolerance and diversity, towards a cosmopolitan vision which in fact I think was worthy of Columbia at its best. And indeed until his last breath, which was drawn in December, 1942, at the then Men's Faculty Club across the street, he had just launched a new initiative to combat racism in the world when he keeled over at his podium, dead. And lest I follow him to the grave, I will stop here. Thank you.
Ken Jackson Responds to the Respondents

Kenneth T. Jackson: I want to turn it over to you very quickly so I won't say very much, except that I do think some other . . . I think the University of Chicago, just for an example, in the twentieth century more directly encountered the city and took the city as not just the location of the university but something that was fundamental to what the university was doing. And perhaps NYU maybe followed in those footsteps. There was a book written ten or twenty years ago called The Last Intellectuals by a guy named Russell Jacobi who talked about the New York Intellectuals, the famous group of the thirties and the forties and the fifties and even into the sixties and how they'd disappeared. And the problem was that they kind of joined faculties around the country and got tenure and no longer were trying to reach kind of a general political well-educated public. But I still think, in terms of generalities, not specifics . . . is that Columbia through most of its history has seen New York as a problem rather than an opportunity—it drove up the cost of living, it meant that the University couldn't expand to build a new science building or something else—rather than it gives the University something that other places can not have. And I think that even though obviously what Mike said is true about the professionalization of professions, and the credentialing of them through new business and law and medical and architecture schools—and Columbia's had as much to do with that as anybody else—you could still go somewhere else and do that, you didn't need to be in New York to do it. But anyway I would like to hear from Bob and then the crowd.

Summary and Opening Up Discussion to Audience

Robert McCaughey: I have a couple of responsibilities as moderator. I'm thinking of the remark that Franklin Roosevelt made to two of his economic advisors who came in with absolutely contrary policies, and he sent them out and told them to blend them together and come back in with a united position. I think there is a basic point of contention between Mike's remarks and those of Ken. I should also add that I appreciated Mike Wallace making passing reference to Charles A. Beard, he being the sort of patron saint of our activities, somebody who quit Columbia University at some point on a point of principle.

I think a couple of remarks that Ken made can help turn to some of what Mike was pointing to. Yes, there were several times where Columbia thought, perhaps leave the city and go off to other climes. I don't think they ever quite spoke of Hanover,
but Westchester was a kind of proximate equivalent. There was one point where Staten Island was considered as a viable alternative to the messiness of Lower Manhattan. I never believed those were offered very seriously. They were kind of opening gestures. These were Episcopalian elites, but they were very connected to the City of New York, and they had full confidence that it was their city, and they concluded that not on the basis of counting heads but of the prominence that they had in the city. So there was, I think, a commitment on the part of elite New York to an idea of Columbia as being part of their city. And to a very real extent by the end of the nineteenth century that begins to leak away.

Mike spoke of going off to prep school, sending . . . Columbia trustees had the dickens of a time trying to keep their own sons here at Columbia. And then when they would go away there'd be a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, the place just wasn't right. But those sons by and large came back for the professional schools, and it was the professional schools where Seth Low put his money, and where F. A. P. Barnard put his money, and where Butler, for all the gratuitous gestures he made with respect to the College, that was his University. And in that sense it seems to me a book like *Gotham*, which does not make much mention of Columbia, or other equally terrific social histories of New York City—Christine Stansell's on the women of New York, Sean Wilentz on democratic change, a study of the labor movements in New York—make very little reference to Columbia as well. But I suspect if you looked at the history of science, if you looked at the history of medicine, and as Mike has pointed out with a somewhat more critical view than I would apply to it, at the history of law in New York City, then Columbia looms very large. And it seems to me it has had a place in a substantial part of New York's history . . . it has not been comprehensive.

The second point relates to the question of how Columbia fits into the notion of . . . now I'm going to have to think a little bit about it, because I need the second half of that sentence. The New York City population notion of falling behind. Again Columbia . . . the dates that Ken picked are very apt. There is virtually no growth at all at Columbia College into the 1850s. But by 1900 this is a huge place, it's the largest university in the country. I think it was the best—Columbians thought so. It was the richest and largest, and it kept growing. And in that sense the takeoff of Columbia in its professional schools matched a good deal of the takeoff in the corporate life of New York City. And in that sense, to think of Columbia as shying away from the city I think is wrong.

The final point. Columbia proved, as it proves now, perhaps not to be as open to going out and meeting and encountering and engaging the city. But it also proved to be a very leaky place. It was very ineffective, if that's what it was trying to do, to keep the city out. And I think the numbers that Mike suggests where all the effort
was made to limit the number of Jewish students here at Columbia, and to keep Jews from becoming members of the faculty . . . no question about the effort, considerable question about the success of it, though, even during the 1920s and 1930s, when there is clear evidence that there was a concerted effort to limit those numbers. So in that sense being part of the city is very different from being part of Boston for Harvard. Columbia in a sense can ask New York City, "What have you done for us lately?" New York has never had to ask Columbia that, and Columbia does seem to me . . . has regularly been obliged to justify its presence in New York. And, I think, in response to Mike's remarks, it's still doing so. There may be other comments, but then let's go to people out in the audience. If you will, there are mikes on other stair, and we're open to questions.

**Question-and-Answer Period**

**Man:** Well, I just happened to complete three lectures at the New York Society Library, which this year is also celebrating its 250th anniversary, and the lectures were on New York City as intellectual capital, which is the topic of a subsequent lecture here. And I found myself focused on Bender's New York intellect book, and specifically most of it actually was a discussion rather more than a lecture because we got carried away with what happened at Columbia in precisely the period that Ken is talking about, between the Civil War and Progressive Era, actually as World War I loomed, and the role that Nicholas Murray Butler played. He made Ahab look like I don't know *Fantasy Island*, in terms of his stewardship. His most famous statement, Butler's, is "The limited liability corporation was a greater invention, even more so than the steam engine." He was corporate steel through and through. And Columbia had attracted by the First World War the man you see gracing your pamphlet, Charles Beard. Beard, of course, one of the great synthesizers of American history, and a generalist as well as being a wonderful master of detail in his histories.

But the point I want to make here is that Beard came to the defense of one of the founders of the American Psychological Association. I believe it was Robinson, right, the fellow who because of his position on the war . . .

**Robert McCaughey:** James McKeen Cattell.

**Man:** Cattell, I'm sorry, right. And Cattell was forced from his position in the psychology department by Butler because of his position on the war, and Beard and
a host of other Columbia intellectuals left to form The New School. So Columbia had the potential in the First World War of becoming the center and the magnet of American intellectual life, and the corporate mentality of Mr. Butler destroyed it. And it took a while for it to recover itself. And the comment I wanted to throw out here because I want to link some of the statements I've made here and . . .

Robert McCaughey: Let me try to turn that into a question, and if I have it right, what happened to Columbia after the First World War . . . from the intellectual heights that it had achieved before the First World War? And you provide us with at least the possibility of an answer in the person of Nicholas Murray Butler.

Well, I don't have my Episcopal tie on tonight, so I feel quite open about Butler in general, and in fact 1917 works quite well. There were three Nicholas Murray Butlers, that's what happens when you live to be 84 years old and you're working all the time. There was the very efficient corporate president up until the First World War, who took a thriving institution and just drove it more and brought people like Beard, who he loved to talk to. Beard never challenged Butler, and not because Beard was a different person, but I think there was some sense that there were some intellectual activity going back and forth across that line. But the First World War makes a real turning point for Columbia. The trustees of the University make some decisions that put them at odds with a faculty that thought it was really without any particular constraints on its own academic freedom. And that's a pretty basic challenge. Butler decided to enter into that fray, sided with the trustees for a long enough period of time to cost the University people like Beard, Robinson. John Dewey went into a kind of internal hibernation, or Franz Boas, one of the heroes for Mike Wallace, spends the next ten years mostly over at Barnard, a kind of internal exile. It was a serious moment in Columbia's history and represented a kind of setback. Fortunately, though, for Columbia's reputation, reputations change slowly. And I think that caught up with Columbia thirty years later, but it was a serious moment and not one of Columbia's best.

Other questions, though. Please.

Solomon Moscovitch: Hello. Good evening, gentlemen. My name is Solomon Moscovitch and I'm a senior in the college. I have the privilege of giving tours here, and I've always on my tour stated the fact that the School of Mines was founded in 1864, which for me is always conspicuously in the middle of the Civil War. And I know that throughout history governments and countries that are at war, particularly such a destructive war as the Civil War, are always looking for ways to build bigger and better weapons. And I'm wondering, was the founding of the School of Mines in '64, how closely related that was to the Union war effort? And if it was, why did they choose Columbia? Why did the government choose Columbia to foster this new
school of engineering, especially given the stunning information for me that in 1854 there were only six faculty members? And just as a side question, how do you think—if again that's true, which I've always suspected that it is—how has that affected the character of the School of Mines and now the engineering school and maybe the other schools in the University? Thank you.

**Robert McCaughey:** This one seems like a fat pitch for Evan, if you want to take it on.

**Evan Cornog:** The School of Mines and I go way back.

**Kenneth T. Jackson:** I was going to say it's not just weapons that you're building, it's bridges and railroads that are in desperate requirement during a war and also with the huge expansion of the national economy during the 1860s. So I want to say Rensselaer and West Point, maybe those are the only two before the . . .

**Robert McCaughey:** No, MIT had started.

**Kenneth T. Jackson:** But not many, you're right, not many, and the war could've been a stimulus because so many things have to be built and rebuilt after the destruction.

**Michael Wallace:** But I mean I think I'd second Ken that in fact while it's true that engineers were crucial, including literally digging tunnels to get past the other side's lines, it's preceded by this tremendous explosion, particularly in New York City of public works construction. And that it is both a response to that, and I think in terms of the argument that I was making—the development of a new intellectual class—it's in fact one of the first places that you actually see this happening, where professionals are organizing and trying to say, "Listen, we want to credential ourselves not on the basis of artisanal modes—you know, you apprentice yourself to somebody, you learn like most of the canal diggers in New York did, on the job—but you learn by learning the underlying principles, the abstractions, the fundamental science. This is what distinguishes a true professional from a hack," they would have said. This battle was going on in medicine, in law, in many areas. But in fact the first . . . and I would argue it's because of the city's and the state's primacy in massive public works and then public health enterprises, that this becomes one of the first places that that happens. It reaches critical mass there first.

**Robert McCaughey:** There are a couple of financial aspects of it, too. That 1864 is about the first time in a hundred years where Columbia begins to feel rich again. Property that it had owned on the site of what becomes Rockefeller Center started to return income at that point, and Columbia found itself flush. The best way to
overcome that kind of condition is to open a medical school, but second best is an expensive engineering school, and Columbia proceeded to do so at that point quite effectively. I also think it's a moment where the college begins to be subverted. You could go to the School of Mines without going to the college, which was also the case of the law school, so that Columbia was now being opened to serious young men who were on their way up some tree or corporate ladder. And the engineering school and the law school both provided the kinds of credentials that the college was seen not to provide at all. One more question.

**Man:** I think we must always be mindful of the fact that at least up until the mid- and late forties a significant percentage of our undergraduates who were Jewish spent many of the credits of their senior year at Teachers' College because they'd been told you'd better have a teacher's certificate. They went on, of course, with African American students. With our law students who were Irish, they were told what you can expect to find is a job at an insurance company, but not be invited into a partnership. The good news I think is that in the last 15 years I have dinner with students, groups of students several times a year, and what they say is, "The reason I applied and the reason I was happy to be admitted is because I wanted to avoid the parochialism that I'd find in my local university or college, even though it might be a very high-quality state university, for example, at much lower cost. I wanted to come here where I would meet a diverse group of students, a diverse faculty, and be part of New York City." And the ones that I talk to who are seniors and some who are young alumni are having much greater job opportunities and tell me they were thrilled not just with the Core Curriculum but with chances to get to meet each other. I think the theme of diversity that some of you have raised is a very important one.

**Kenneth T. Jackson:** It's probably true that Columbia, of all of America's sort of famous, wealthy, old, elite institutions, has the most diverse . . . if you just take the whole range of its student body, so we're talking about history here. I think Columbia has seriously embraced the city in recent years, and I think the growth in applications . . . I think Columbia, to its credit, embraced the city and now it's benefiting and sees itself as benefiting from New York City. And the last thing Columbia wants to do now is move to the suburbs or move to Hanover or anything else. So the city is paying back Columbia, and Columbia it.

**Robert McCaughey:** Well the conclusion is that we're stuck with each other then, New York and Columbia, and we with you. I'd like to thank Ken Jackson as our main speaker and the two respondents, Mike Wallace and Evan Cornog, and invite all of you to a reception immediately after we clear off the stage, back in the Faculty Room which can be reached through either of the doors on either side of the podium. Thank you for coming and good evening.