


ARTICLE

# Race and the Yale Report of 1828

Lily Todorinova 

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Email: [lily.todorinova@rutgers.edu](mailto:lily.todorinova@rutgers.edu)

## Abstract

This essay recontextualizes the Yale Report of 1828, arguing that the report's advocacy for classical liberal education should be understood alongside the racial concerns of its authors, some of whom were well-known colonizationists who viewed African American education as a threat to New Haven's social and economic stability. The Yale Report's vision for leadership and economic success not only excluded African Americans by default, but created a lasting binary that defined Black educational opportunities in the nineteenth century and beyond. The essay considers the near overlap between the writing of the Yale Report and the failed proposal to establish an African American men's college in New Haven in 1831, placing the document within a key period in the history of American higher education in which education became highly commodified and racialized. Building upon scholarship on the Yale Report that has already considered its neorepublican aims, this essay opens the possibility of viewing the document beyond its immediate concerns with curricular reform and contemplating the elusive connections between American higher education, race, and power.

**Keywords:** African American Education; colonizationism; higher education; Yale Report of 1828

The Yale Report of 1828 is a declarative statement about the purpose of higher education, issued at a crucial time in the development of American colleges.<sup>1</sup> David Potts writes that by the 1820s, America had started to become “a land of colleges” and the report was well suited to forge a persuasive connection between higher education and national interest.<sup>2</sup> The report became an “indispensable reference point” influencing new institutions that emerged in the century of expansion before and after the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> By issuing the report, Yale sharpened the concept of liberal education for both personal and national success, in ways that still resonate in university mission

<sup>1</sup> David Potts writes that Yale's pamphlet has been mislabeled by scholars who employ the singular noun to discuss two “reports.” This paper considers both reports together and uses the singular noun, which appears in most of the scholarship written on the subject. See David B. Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges: Yale's Reports of 1828* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, xv.

statements today. For many historians, the Yale Report is a necessary pre-requisite to understanding the purpose, history, and future of American higher education.<sup>4</sup>

However, the Yale Report to date has been tied to only one of two interrelated histories of higher education in the United States, that of White higher education, while its relevance to Black higher education has not been explored. Historians, including Melvin Urofsky, Michael Pak, Kenneth Nivison, and Johann Neem, have analyzed the report from many useful angles, showing that it was deeply intertwined with nineteenth-century politics.<sup>5</sup> Jack Lane recognizes the report as a neorepublican statement, an attempt to reconcile private enterprise and civic virtue.<sup>6</sup> According to Lane's analysis, the Yale Report is a statement for and by the ruling class, intending not only to defend liberal education from criticism about the extent of its usefulness, but to promote it as a mechanism for imparting young (White) men with a set of moral precepts essential to a capitalistic society's well-being.<sup>7</sup> While these authors do not specifically address it, the document's politics inevitably tie it to a larger racial ideology. The actual relationship between the Yale Report, colonizationism, and the difficult history of African American higher education, however, has not been addressed.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, I argue that race is central to understanding the Yale Report's purpose and legacy, which complicates what some have called the "gospel" of American higher

<sup>4</sup>Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, xviii.

<sup>5</sup>See Melvin I. Urofsky, "Reforms and Response: The Yale Report of 1828," *History of Education Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Mar., 1965), 53–67; Michael Pak, "The Yale Report of 1828: A New Reading and New Implications," *History of Education Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (Feb. 2008), 30–57; Kenneth Nivison, "But a Step from College to the Judicial Bench": College and Curriculum in New England's "Age of Improvement," *History of Education Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Nov. 2010), 460–87; Johann N. Neem, "Liberal Education Confronts the Rise of Democracy: Yale's Reports of 1828," *History of Humanities* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2019), 401–22.

<sup>6</sup>Jack C. Lane, "The Yale Report of 1828 and Liberal Education: A Neorepublican Manifesto," *History of Education Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1987), 325–38.

<sup>7</sup>Lane, "The Yale Report of 1828 and Liberal Education," 335.

<sup>8</sup>See Bruce Rosen, "Abolition and Colonization, the Years of Conflict: 1829–1834," *Phylon* (1960–) 33, no. 2 (2nd Qtr. 1972), 177–92; James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790–1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 181–217; and Frankie Hutton, "Economic Considerations in the American Colonization Society's Early Effort to Emigrate Free Blacks to Liberia, 1816–36," *Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 4 (Fall 1983), 376–89. "Colonizationism" here refers to the dominant ideology of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in the North. The ACS was formed in 1816 and was endorsed by notable figures, including Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson. The aim of the ACS was not to interfere with the institution of slavery, but to focus on the removal of free African Americans from the United States. The impracticality of the colonizationist agenda was often questioned (see Hutton, "Economic Considerations," 376). Rosen writes that in the first fourteen years of its existence, the society sent fewer than 1,500 African Americans to Liberia, and it is estimated that two-thirds of them were manumitted expressly on the condition that they would resettle (see "Abolition and Colonization, the Years of Conflict," 178–80). Nonetheless, the ACS's growing appeal in the North owed to the solution it offered to those who had anxieties about the place of free African Americans in American society. James Brewer Stewart writes that the "compounding crisis in racial definitions and race relations" that characterized the North in the 1820s and 1830s increased the popularity of the ACS (see "The Emergence of Racial Modernity," 181). The ACS assumed a "benevolent" tone in its approach to race relations, focusing on Christian virtues and extolling White men's call to "uplift" the inherently inferior Black race (p. 194). African Americans overwhelmingly rejected the ACS, as many were suspicious of the intentions of the eminent officials who led the society. In 1829's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, David Walker condemned the "colonizing trick" at the center of the ACS's agenda (p. 195).

education.<sup>9</sup> While the Yale Report was only one part of a larger curricular conversation and its influence may have been diluted over time, looking back at the document can be an eerily familiar experience. The connection the Yale Report forged between the economic well-being of the nation and higher education, as well as its endorsement of what we now call “lifelong learning,” has permeated the rhetoric of American universities into the present.

The document so far has been taken at face value as being silent about race. While the primary function of the Yale Report was to negotiate internal and external curricular pressures, the time period, location, and authorship of the document place it within a well-articulated racial context. A closer look reveals that the Yale Report’s authors were active in curtailing African American access to education and civic participation at the time of the report’s publication. As colonizationists of local as well as national influence, members of the Yale faculty and corporation were vocal about their racial anxieties in the years before and after the document’s publication. These anxieties included explicit concern about the connection they saw between Black higher education, New Haven’s economic interests, Yale’s southern patronage, and social unrest. Race was central to how these men secured their personal success, as well as to how Yale secured its institutional stature and reach. As an attempt to accommodate the republican curriculum to the social and economic realities of nineteenth-century America, the Yale Report reveals how these intellectuals aimed to shape their nation and the type of leadership they envisioned, as well as what they rejected.

At the time of the report’s publication, efforts to expand African American educational opportunities were faced with widespread and often violent opposition.<sup>10</sup> Even as a few Black men gained admission to prestigious institutions in the Northeast, for the most part, access to the type of education that the Yale Report espoused was decidedly off-limits. As colonizationists’ efforts to repatriate large segments of the Black population failed and African Americans slowly gained entry into higher education, they were nonetheless subject to different rules than those for the Yale Report’s enterprising, self-determining vision for White American leadership. It is notable that the Yale Report manifests an elite, self-determining ruling class in stark contrast to the subservient, disenfranchised laboring class that scholars may recognize in Samuel Armstrong’s project at Hampton University.<sup>11</sup> Both approaches are ideological, and while they are polar opposites, they are each compatible with a particular racial and national vision. In the legacy of the Yale Report, African American intellectuals confronted the task of transcending these binaries and achieving not only equal and commensurate educational opportunities, but ones that can alleviate the problems of oppression, instability,

<sup>9</sup>Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 132.

<sup>10</sup>Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 33–78.

identity ambiguity, and class conflict embedded in an elite education that was designed to reject them.<sup>12</sup>

The aim of this paper is to facilitate a connection between scholarship on the Yale Report that discusses the political significance of the document but does not discuss race, and the context in which the report was written, where race features prominently. There are limitations to this approach. While the paper offers multiple possibilities for *how* the Yale Report relates to the struggle of Black higher education in the United States, it necessarily eschews a simple cause and effect. Instead, the essay suggests that the report's economic preoccupation and the activities of its authors contribute to the racial context of the time of its publication. Therefore, the report played a part in shaping White higher education as well as Black higher education, as its inverse. Within its pages, the Yale Report defined liberal education as a means to an end—the accumulation of wealth and power by an enterprising White elite, encased and dignified in the study of classical languages and literature. It used the intellectual tools of that elite to respond to the public's urgent questions: *What is the purpose of higher education? Who is higher education for?* Yale's stature and influence on other institutions, its southern alumni networks, and Connecticut racial politics all contributed to the document's agenda, as well as to how liberal education became a racialized commodity. The Yale Report was, and still is, an influential blueprint of American higher education, but its deliberate national call for self-centered economic activity was also race-centered and indicative of the concerns of its authors about the role of higher education in an environment of slowly expanding opportunities for African Americans.

## The Yale Report

The following quotation, found at the end of Part One of the Yale Report, captures the ambitious nature of the document and its advocacy for the importance of liberal education at the heart of the American experience:

The active, enterprising character of our population, renders it highly important, that this bustle and energy should be directed by sound intelligence, the result of deep thought and early discipline... . Light and moderate learning is but poorly fitted to direct the energies of a nation, so widely extended, so intelligent, so powerful in resources, so rapidly advancing in population, strength, and opulence. Where a free government gives full liberty to the human intellect to expand and operate, education should be proportionally liberal and ample.<sup>13</sup>

The Yale Report of 1828 was written by Yale's president, Reverend Jeremiah Day, and faculty Benjamin Silliman and James Kingsley. It was enthusiastically endorsed by the full faculty and corporation and published in Silliman's influential journal, *American Journal of Science and Arts*, in 1829, providing for its wide distribution across the

<sup>12</sup>Derrick P. Alridge, "Guiding Philosophical Principles for a Du Boisian-Based African American Educational Model," *Journal of Negro Education* 68, no. 2 (Spring 1999), 182–99.

<sup>13</sup>*Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College; By a Committee of the Corporation, and the Academical Faculty* (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe, 1828), 30.

country.<sup>14</sup> In the background of this document is a decades-long debate about the role of classical education within the context of a vastly changing modern world, both in the United States and in England.<sup>15</sup> The report constitutes two sections, one devoted to the plan of education at Yale and the second a justification of the classical curriculum. The popular concept of mental discipline is central to the report's argument. In addition to instilling "correct taste," studying classical languages and literature was supposed to train students' intellectual faculties to excel in any setting and career.<sup>16</sup> In the decades surrounding the Yale Report, classical education was being criticized for perpetuating an educational approach that was unsuited to a growing industrialized nation with a robust market economy.<sup>17</sup> The Yale Report provides a forceful justification of liberal education, which was Yale's brand, engaging directly with educational literature from the 1800s, as well as with statements issued by Amherst College and Harvard University, which had been experimenting with their curriculum in favor of new methods.<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the report was not merely to protect the old status quo, however. The authors of the Yale Report were not out of touch with educational advancements, or unaware of the importance of synching higher education to the needs of the nation. In fact, historians, notably Jack Lane, have shown that viewing the document as derivative or reactionary may not accurately explain its origin, purpose, or legacy.<sup>19</sup>

The report began by laying out President Day's vision for Yale. He strongly disagreed with the implication that higher education institutions focused on liberal education, like Yale, were outdated, or that they were not meeting contemporary needs. The report ostensibly conceded that the education offered at Yale could be improved; indeed, it would have to be improved "from time to time," in order to respond to the needs of the community and to "accommodate the course of instruction to the rapid advance of the country, in population, refinement, and opulence."<sup>20</sup> While the authors defended the established educational apparatus, they also looked to the future in charting a path for higher education that would be aligned with the economic interests of the nation. In addition, Day believed that "gentlemen" institutions are being threatened by competition from subpar colleges.<sup>21</sup> One impetus for the report was the emergence of a bewildering number of colleges within a growing decentralized and deregulated higher educational system.<sup>22</sup> In addition to unchecked institutional growth, internal

<sup>14</sup>For more information about the origins and history of the Yale Report, see Ralph Henry Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale: The Church of Christ in the College and University, 1757-1957* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958).

<sup>15</sup>Jürgen Herbst, "The Yale Report of 1828," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2004), 213–31.

<sup>16</sup>*Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 36.

<sup>17</sup>Urofsky, "Reforms and Response," 53. For a detailed study of the curricular debates in Antebellum colleges, see Stanley M. Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-bellum American College* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975).

<sup>18</sup>Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-bellum American College*, 54.

<sup>19</sup>Lane, "The Yale Report of 1828 and Liberal Education," 326.

<sup>20</sup>*Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 5.

<sup>21</sup>Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, 144.

<sup>22</sup>Pak, "The Yale Report of 1828," 37.

challenges, including student protests and university administrations in disarray, were also contributing to turmoil in even the most established institutions.<sup>23</sup> Yale was no exception and had its share of financial troubles, despite its steady enrollments and lucrative connections in the South.<sup>24</sup> Although, within its pages, the authors of the report were narrowly focused on retorting against unwelcome curricular reform in other institutions, they were also deeply aware of what was at stake. Amherst and Harvard were the tip of the iceberg of the classical education reform debate, and the fact that Amherst's reforms were so short-lived had already made Yale's case. However, the document's authors understood that the report was about more than the sum of its parts.

The Yale Report constitutes a cohesive political statement, drafted by men with tremendous influence and connections. In closely engaging in dialogue with other institutions, the report draws a clear line between Yale and the rest. While other universities might busy themselves with reform, Yale declared its intention to furnish the leadership of the republic and to provide superior education for superior men.<sup>25</sup> This is the selling point of the report and of Yale itself, one intended to weather the socioeconomic and demographic changes shaping higher education in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Yale's goal was to survive (and thrive) despite industrialization, emancipation, and the broadening of educational opportunities for the masses. This preoccupation with national health and wealth has an unstated, though evident, racial context. The report continuously and deliberately evokes the rhetoric of liberty and freedom, placing value on the civic participation from which African Americans were largely excluded. Yale's clientele and audience were White men of privilege, and the report unquestionably addresses them. The notion of White wealth in the subtext of the document is core to its vision. The Yale Report came at just the right time and place to unite higher education to economic and political progress. It presented an opportunity to further enhance Yale's status, and its faculty was adept at seizing opportunities.<sup>26</sup> "Yale had spoken," and the influence of the report traveled to new institutions west and south, accelerated by Yale's influence and reputation.<sup>27</sup> The Yale Report took the common refrains of "faculty psychology" and liberal education, and amplified and supersized them, giving them the stature of a national educational doctrine, while, in Jacksonian fashion, excluding large segments of that nation.<sup>28</sup>

### Early Nineteenth-Century African American Higher Education in Connecticut

How does the history of the Yale Report, as described above, relate to African American education? What does the report in question, written for and by a White ruling class,

<sup>23</sup>Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, 23.

<sup>24</sup>Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, 12.

<sup>25</sup>*Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 6.

<sup>26</sup>Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, 25.

<sup>27</sup>Urofsky, "Reforms and Response," 61.

<sup>28</sup>Faculty psychology, which was a popular concept at the time of writing the report, is the theory that the mind is separated into faculties or sections, and that each of these faculties is assigned to certain mental tasks. See Tracy B. Henley, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 8th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017), 175–76.

have to do with the concurrent trajectory of slowly expanding educational opportunities for Black men? According to Hilary Moss, opposition to African American education was not always active or virulent; in fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, White citizens and slaveholders tolerated and sometimes encouraged aspects of African American learning. Education carried “profound significance ... to black parents, pupils, teachers, and activists, many of whom came of age under slavery.”<sup>29</sup> Although college education was difficult to access even for White men at the beginning of the nineteenth century, African Americans managed to gain entry in greater numbers than historians previously recognized. Before the end of the Civil War, approximately forty Black men are known to have graduated from college; however, the number could be larger, as many of the first graduates of color in institutions such as Columbia University and Princeton were listed as “unknown.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1827, James Pennington escaped slavery in Maryland, and a few years later moved to New Haven after hearing about the possibility of a Black men’s college being built there. He audited classes at Yale but was not able to formally enroll.<sup>31</sup> The Black college, which will be discussed in the next section, famously never happened, and its demise is integrally connected to some of the authors of the Yale Report. Pennington’s story is indicative of the promise African Americans found in higher education, as a path to civic inclusion and power.<sup>32</sup>

The proposed but unrealized African American college in New Haven, which was a revolutionary collaboration between philanthropists of both races, was supposed to combine manual or industrial training with study of the classics and literature.<sup>33</sup> Planners hoped that the college would help create a Black professional class and educate students for careers in law, medicine, and divinity, in addition to mercantile, mechanical, and agricultural employment.<sup>34</sup> The college was intended to fill a void in training opportunities for the growing African American population, which had been excluded and underserved. While African Americans were part of the New Haven Colony from its inception, their numbers steadily increased from two hundred in 1790 to over six hundred in 1820.<sup>35</sup> This increase, alongside gradual emancipation, triggered a backlash. While in the beginning of the century, Black residents of New Haven could sustain themselves in service jobs and own property, in 1818 Connecticut amended its constitution to eliminate the property requirement and add Whiteness as the definition of full citizenship.<sup>36</sup> According to Moss, White Americans’ tolerance for African American

<sup>29</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 7.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Bruce Slater, “The Blacks Who First Entered the World of White Higher Education,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 4 (Summer 1994), 47–56.

<sup>31</sup>Daryl Keith Daniels, “African-Americans at the Yale University School of Medicine: 1810-1960,” *Yale Medicine Thesis Digital Library*, <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=ymtld>.

<sup>32</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 8.

<sup>33</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 47.

<sup>34</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 49.

<sup>35</sup>Jean Sutherland, “Examining the African American Role in New Haven History: Pride in the Past—Hope for the Future,” *Curricular Resources, Volume III* (New Haven, CT: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 1992), <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/1992/3/92.03.08.x.html>.

<sup>36</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 25.



education ended within the following decade, when most states enacted anti-literacy laws.<sup>37</sup> Moss's analysis suggests that education at this time started to be viewed as a racialized, high-stakes commodity, capable of altering New Haven's socioeconomic structure and demographics. As she writes, one of the prevalent concerns about the Black college was that it would attract more former slaves, like Pennington, to move to New Haven from the South.<sup>38</sup>

As the co-capital of Connecticut and the state's largest city, New Haven was considered by many to be a progressive city, a place of publishing and learning.<sup>39</sup> This reputation owed in large part to Yale itself, which had the nation's largest enrollment of students at this time.<sup>40</sup> However, Yale and New Haven's prosperity and racial tolerance came with caveats. Rapid industrialization created working-class tensions throughout the state. In New Haven, prosperity translated to a rigid class structure, in which elites were concerned about anyone devaluing their college degrees, even the White working poor.<sup>41</sup> Public schooling was in disarray and New Haven's image as a city that prized learning was misleading—except, of course, for its private academies, at the top of which stood Yale.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Connecticut's deep political ties to southern slave owners meant that the wealth accumulated by New Haven elites was also dependent on enslaved labor, which in the 1830s was the nation's second capital investment next to land.<sup>43</sup>

The combination of industrialization, New Haven's political ties in the South, and ongoing emancipation in the North was volatile and unsympathetic to Black education in the city. Definitions of American identity that excluded African Americans fed the public discourse at this time. The proposal for the Black college's most powerful adversary was colonizationism—a dominant racial ideology that sought to exclude African Americans from the republican vision by repatriating them to Africa. Providing higher education opportunities to African Americans meant that their existence in Connecticut society would have to be acknowledged. Making space in higher education implied making civil space, which was incongruent with colonizationist doctrine, as has been already discussed. Moreover, the Black college's curriculum placed African American interests too unacceptably at the forefront by combining classical and technical teaching in ways that were not only relevant for repatriation, but could also be interpreted as enabling African Americans to participate in the American economy in the future. New Haven colonizationists, including most of Yale's faculty, controlled the fate of African American education in New Haven and, in their view, education's role was to nominally prepare African Americans for their "repatriation" to Africa.<sup>44</sup> The African American schools that did exist in the Northeast were not there to integrate

<sup>37</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> James Brewer Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," *New England Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Sept. 2003), 325.

<sup>40</sup> Potts, *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," 329.

<sup>44</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 19.



Black people into American society, but to assert their difference, their separate nature, their presumed inferiority.<sup>45</sup>

New Haven and Yale became the sites where elite education clashed with its political and economic underpinnings when it came to race. New Haven's White elite organized their profits alongside dominant racial interests, which meant that the proposed African American college stood little chance of succeeding.<sup>46</sup> Leading up to the infamous vote against the college in 1831, African American higher education and incremental civil progress were pinned against Yale's status, White working-class men's opportunities in New Haven, and national peace and stability. Colonizationism provided the ideology to tie these together, in a way that preserved Yale's southern patronage and catered to New Haven's White supremacists. The perception that New Haven was "under siege" permeated the conversation in 1831, culminating with local newspapers linking Nat Turner's rebellion to the proposed African American college.<sup>47</sup>

It is these events—the publication of the Yale Report in 1828 and the demise of what could have been the nation's first historically black college or university in New Haven in 1831—that stand out as integrally connected in the history of American higher education. As elite White American colleges, like Yale, were engaging in high-level conversations about the role of the republican curriculum, their faculty and leadership simultaneously participated in efforts to stifle African American access to education and, by extension, civic rights. If we understand the larger racial context surrounding the Yale Report, we can perceive how the relationship between the two events, while not direct or causal, is a by-product of that context.

Black education signaled a threat, whether to southern patronage or White concerns of miscegenation, to the preservation and growth of White entrepreneurial wealth, which is one of the preoccupations of the Yale Report. As the next section will show, Yale's influence, reputation, and survival were thoroughly tied to racial politics and dominated by colonizationism. By design, colonizationists promoted a narrative that depicted African Americans as inarticulate, unintelligent, and incapable of education, in order to remove them from public spaces.<sup>48</sup> The authors of the Yale Report supported this narrative and crafted their vision of higher education in this context. Their path forward for republican higher education rejected, ignored, and erased African Americans. It rested on a thoroughly imagined racial cohesiveness, which they hoped would be accomplished through White wealth and enterprise.

### Yale's Opposition: Colonizationism and Racial Propaganda

And whereas in the opinion of this meeting, Yale College, the institutions for the education of females, and the other schools, already existing in this city, are important to the community and the general interests of science, and as such

<sup>45</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 38.

<sup>46</sup>Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," 329.

<sup>47</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 62.

<sup>48</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 13.

have been deservedly patronized by the public, and the establishment of a College in the same place to educate the colored population is incompatible with the prosperity, if not the existence of the present institutions of learning, and will be destructive to the best interests of the city ... we will resist the establishment of the proposed college in this place, by every lawful means.<sup>49</sup>

The Yale Report of 1828 was embedded in colonizationist and White supremacist activity, which resulted in “three of the most notorious efforts to restrict black education of the entire antebellum area,” including the opposition to the African American college in 1831 and Prudence Crandall’s trial in 1834.<sup>50</sup> All four of the men who spoke up against the “Negro college” and six of the nine who did not speak but signed the opposition statement were deeply involved with Yale, as faculty, members of the corporation, or alumni of the institution. The authors of the Yale Report were part of a political network that ostensibly condemned slavery while also working to prevent African American civic participation. Jeremiah Day, Benjamin Silliman, and Nathaniel Taylor were dedicated colonizationists, and there was a symbiotic relationship between colonizationist activity and Yale’s institutional success.

Benjamin Silliman and David Daggett, in particular, feature prominently in the rejection of the Black college.<sup>51</sup> These men’s career trajectories and political thought can help illuminate the ideological connections between the Yale Report and opposition to African American education. As influential scholars and political leaders, Silliman and Daggett approached the question of race somewhat differently throughout their careers; however, both ended up on the same side in rejecting the Black college proposal in 1831. While Daggett’s opposition to African American rights remained consistent throughout his life, Silliman’s hardened over time. Their approach to the Black college is a case study of how influential intellectuals navigated their status as progressives with conservative racial values. The apparent contradiction between attitudes toward slavery, which these men rejected, and Black rights, which they opposed thoroughly, was politically and personally expedient. The contradiction itself was a comfortable source of ambiguity: it enabled Yale’s faculty to maintain close ties to its slave-owning patrons in the South, as well as promote and, perhaps, rationalize their own success, which they knew had its roots in slavery and was still dependent on racial exploitation.

The hostility of the Connecticut elite to expanding educational opportunities to African Americans surprised many.<sup>52</sup> The proponents of the Black college mistook its

<sup>49</sup>Simeon Smith Jocelyn, and Committee for Superintending the Application for Funds for the College for Colored Youth, *College for Colored Youth: An Account of the New-Haven City Meeting and Resolutions, With Recommendations of the College, and Strictures Upon the Doings of New-Haven* (New York: Published by the Committee, 1831), 5, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2053945>. The quote above is credited to Dennis Kimberly, mayor of New Haven, in 1831. The source publication was compiled by Simeon Jocelyn to provide a record of the African American college proposal, including the support for the idea and its surprisingly negative reception by New Haven elites. The collection includes contemporary newspaper coverage and an account of how the meeting deciding its fate transpired.

<sup>50</sup>Davidson M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2005), 41.

<sup>51</sup>Anthony J. Dugdale, J. J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves, “Yale, Slavery and Abolition” (New Haven, CT: The Amistad Committee, Inc., 2001), <http://www.yaleslavery.org/YSA.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup>Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 61.

proximity to Yale as a good thing, assuming that its “presumably benevolent faculty would offer instruction at a nominal cost.”<sup>53</sup> It seems that, on the contrary, Yale faculty were incensed at the idea, and while there is only one Yale faculty member named in the petition, Stewart writes that “Yale’s officialdom, whom the abolitionists had naively failed to consult before announcing their plans, expressed regret over the rioting but also voiced hostility toward the Negro College. Not a single professor joined Jocelyn and Roger Sherman Baldwin ... to argue in its favor.”<sup>54</sup> As the resolution to condemn the college itself makes clear, Yale and an African American college could not conceivably co-exist together in New Haven, or at all. Yale provided both the material and ideological core of New Haven, and the failure of the proposed Black men’s college was closely tied to the effort to preserve and enhance Yale’s stature and reputation, which was dependent on southern patronage. An African American college within the vicinity of Yale was presumed to be damaging to the interests of the College. In other words, the same intellectuals that forged the connection between liberal schooling and the prosperity of the republic vigorously rejected the possibility of a Black college in their proximity because it was an affront to their political ideology and self-interest. While the Yale Report was framed as promoting stability and national health, the African American college supposedly threatened it. The two were irreconcilable, presenting opposite visions of higher education and national welfare.

Benjamin Silliman is an important figure to consider in the making of American higher education ideology, as well as its mythology. Silliman was among the most pre-eminent American scientists, intellectuals, and educators. The following passage (from 1948) exemplifies his illustrious reputation among scholars of later generations:

Silliman, with his feet planted firmly on orthodox Puritan ground, and his face turned toward a future in which science would stand side by side with the classics and theology, was the connecting link between the old and the new. No one was better suited than he by birth, training, and natural endowments to introduce these changing concepts of education, to awaken in the public mind an interest in science which would serve to open the way to its useful application.<sup>55</sup>

Silliman’s birth did have a lot to do with it, as he came from a prominent slaveholding family and his own education at Yale was facilitated by the sale of slaves.<sup>56</sup> He was a sometimes-passionate opponent of slavery and self-aware of his financial reliance on the institution he opposed. However, Silliman was also an avid colonizationist, whose views became more severe over time, as his stature rose.<sup>57</sup> Silliman’s success illustrates the economic benefits intellectuals received from their participation in racial politics. He was the most well connected and enterprising of the Yale faculty, cultivating a network of former students who became business leaders, politicians, and lifelong collaborators in the South. According to Eric Herschthal, studying Silliman’s

<sup>53</sup> Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870,” 324.

<sup>54</sup> Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870,” 325.

<sup>55</sup> John F. Fulton and Elizabeth H. Thomson, “Benjamin Silliman and the Founding of the Sheffield Scientific School,” *American Scientist* 36, no. 1 (Jan. 1948), 102.

<sup>56</sup> Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves, “Yale, Slavery and Abolition,” 14.

<sup>57</sup> Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves, “Yale, Slavery and Abolition,” 16.

letters, memoirs, and Yale's treasury records shows that Silliman relied upon the financial support of prominent slaveholders, and used it to build up Yale's science program in particular.<sup>58</sup> As he set about modernizing Yale's curriculum, placing the sciences at its core, Silliman raised money from slaveholding alumni and collected geological specimens from deep within slave country. His former student John C. Calhoun, one of South Carolina's wealthiest slaveholders and an eventual states' rights champion, helped him launch the *American Journal of Science and Arts* in 1818, which soon became the nation's premier scientific journal and was the platform Silliman used to distribute the Yale Report.<sup>59</sup>

Silliman's leadership at Yale and his participation in writing the Yale Report were quite compatible with his devotion to colonizationist causes. According to Hugh Davis, Silliman's close associate Leonard Bacon helped shape his views.<sup>60</sup> Both men, who were leaders in the Connecticut Colonization Society (see Table 1), took a tepid approach to supporting Black rights and were cautious about ending slavery too quickly. They espoused an "environmental theory," according to which the degradation of African Americans owed to conditions that can only be ameliorated by "repatriation" to Africa.<sup>61</sup> This belief is evident in the 1828 address by the Connecticut Colonization Society:

But there is one large class among the inhabitants of this country—degraded and miserable—whom none of the efforts in which you are accustomed to engage, can materially benefit. Among the twelve millions who make up our census, two million are Africans—separated from the possessors of the soil by birth, by the brand of indelible ignominy, by prejudices mutual, deep, incurable, by an irconcilable diversity of interests. They are aliens and outcasts;—they are, as a body, degraded beneath the influence of nearly all the motives which prompt other men to enterprise, and almost below the sphere of virtuous affection.<sup>62</sup>

The address proceeds to describe the operating principles of the Connecticut Colonization Society, which maintained that free or enslaved, the African American race was inherently inferior and could not benefit from education:

It is taken for granted that in the present circumstances any effort to produce a general and thorough amelioration in the character and condition of the free

<sup>58</sup>Eric Herschthal, "The Missing Link: Conservative Abolitionists, Slavery, and Yale," African American Intellectual History Society (AAIHS), *Black Perspectives*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/the-missing-link-conservative-abolitionists-slavery-and-yale>.

<sup>59</sup>Eric Herschthal, *The Science of Abolition: How Slaveholders Became the Enemies of Progress* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

<sup>60</sup>Hugh Davis, "Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1837: A Case Study of Leonard Bacon," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 651-75.

<sup>61</sup>Davis, "Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1837," 661.

<sup>62</sup>"Colonization Society of the State of Connecticut, *An Address to the Public by the Managers of the Colonization Society of Connecticut, 1828. With an Appendix* (New Haven, CT: Treadway and Adams, 1828), 4, Antislavery Pamphlet Collection (RB 003), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/murb003-i091>.

**Table 1.** Overlap between the Yale Report of 1828, colonizationist activities, and opposition to African American college in New Haven

	Yale corporation in 1828	Yale faculty in 1828	Colonizationist activity	Opposition to African American college in 1831
Leonard Bacon			Connecticut Colonization Society secretary	x
Jeremiah Day	x	x	American Colonization Society vice president, 1833-1841	x
David Daggett*	x	x	American Colonization Society, New Haven Colonization Society	x
Benjamin Silliman		x	Connecticut Colonization Society vice president	x
Ralph I. Ingersoll*			Connecticut Colonization Society manager	x
Gideon Tomlinson	x		Connecticut Colonization Society president	x
Nathaniel W. Taylor	x		Supported slavery into the 1850s	x
Isaac H. Townsend*		Succeeds Daggett in leading Yale's Law School (1842-1847)		x

Source: Data compiled from Eric Saul, "American Abolitionists and Antislavery Activists: Conscience of the Nation," *Encyclopedia of Slavery and Abolition*, April 4, 2021, <http://www.americanabolitionists.com/american-colonization-society.html>.

\* Spoke against the college at the New Haven meeting in 1831.

people of colour must be to a great extent fruitless... . There is a broad and impassable line of demarcation between every man who has one drop of African blood in his veins and every other class in the community... . The African in this country belongs by birth to the very lowest station in society; and from that station he can never rise... . What motive has the black man to cultivate his mind. Educate him and you have added little or nothing to his happiness—you have unfitted him for the society and sympathies of his degraded kindred, and yet you have not procured for him any admission into the society and sympathy of white men... . If neither education nor property can do anything for him, education and property can do as little for his children after him.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Colonization Society, *An Address to the Public by the Managers of the Colonization Society of Connecticut*, 1828, 5.

1822.]		<i>Some of the Causes of National Anxiety.</i>	17
In 1790	Our colored population was	757,178	
" 1800		1,006,921	
" 1810		1,377,790	
" 1820		1,771,668	
" 1830		2,330,089	
At the same rate of increase it will be			
In 1840		3,045,504	
" 1850		4,111,430	
" 1860		5,549,435	
" 1870		7,491,737	

Figure 1. Benjamin Silliman's statistics on the expansion of the African American population in the US. Source: Benjamin Silliman, *Some of the Causes of National Anxiety: An Address Delivered in the Centre Church in New Haven, July 4th, 1832*, 11, Hathitrust.org.

It is hard to forget that these passages were crafted in 1828, close to the writing of the Yale Report. In Silliman's view, higher education has an adverse effect on Black men, who could not, by nature, advance in the enterprising ways the Yale Report envisioned for White men. In fact, in Silliman's view, Black education was inherently dangerous and subversive. Silliman's rhetoric grew increasingly severe after the Nat Turner rebellion. Reacting to the rebellion and to the Black college, Silliman delivered a speech in 1832 titled "Some of the Causes of National Anxiety," which began with an intense, almost paranoid harangue about the dangers of an impending slave insurrection. For this reason, he said, echoing White supremacist concerns about miscegenation, we must send Black people to Africa, lest "virgins in their beauty and young men in their strength are involved in promiscuous butchery."<sup>64</sup> Silliman was particularly alarmed by the increase in the Black population. The address is full of racial tropes, including Silliman's argument that Black people will reproduce in higher number than White people, leading to a violent clash (see Figure 1). Such a conflict would lead African Americans to suffer losses as well, but according to Silliman, their biopolitical supremacy would mean that they would "care not for their own thousands and tens of thousands slain, for they have still new myriads to replace them."<sup>65</sup>

This is quite a change from Silliman's graduation speech in 1796, for which he composed a poem that depicted slavery in the most unsavory terms, as "the uncur'd gangrene of the unreasoning mind."<sup>66</sup> In a little over thirty years, Silliman had achieved monumental success, becoming one of the foremost American educators, and he did this because of—not despite—his colonizationist politics. In writing the Yale Report

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin Silliman, *Some of the Causes of National Anxiety: An Address Delivered in the Centre Church in New Haven, July 4th, 1832*, 11, Hathitrust.org.

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Silliman, *Some of the Causes of National Anxiety*, 11–12. For White fears of a slave insurrection during the early national period, see Russ Castronovo, "Jeffersonian Trembling: White Nationalism and the Racial Origins of National Security," *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 3 (2021), 20.

<sup>66</sup> Silliman's poem "The Negroe" is quoted in Herschthal, *The Science of Abolition*, 134.

and simultaneously propagating racial fears, Silliman and his colleagues had a two-pronged purpose: craft an ideology of White progress while leveraging their influence as Yale's elite to prevent Black progress.

David Daggett, professor of law, was also part of the Yale faculty at the time of the Yale Report. In addition, he was the most notable and outspoken opponent to the Black college in New Haven. Daggett's name comes up often in the history of resistance to African American education and civic rights. In 1790, he wrote a popular pamphlet depicting, through first-person narrative, the story of Joseph Mountain, an educated Black man who traveled to London and eventually, on his return to Connecticut, was tried, convicted, and hanged for raping a White woman.<sup>67</sup> Daggett claimed that he recorded the story directly from Joseph Mountain himself, who was an actual person and was executed for these crimes, but scholars recognize the anecdote as fictitious and politically motivated. Daggett's story is an attempt to justify Mountain's execution, as well as portray Connecticut's laws and institutions as fair and impartial. Significantly, the story encompasses Daggett's racial views, in which African American education was an existential threat to White stability. Lawrence Goodheart and Peter Hinks write that "while lacking an explicit discussion of the Atlantic slave trade, the American Revolution, emancipation, or contemporary Connecticut politics, Daggett through *Sketches* is nevertheless engaged with them all."<sup>68</sup> In fact, beyond the veil of the first-person narrative, Daggett's purpose was to demonstrate that any attempt at relaxing racial norms was inherently dangerous: "Daggett argues that [Mountain's] supposedly corrupt English experiences with interracial license and endemic class warfare led him ineluctably to commit rape in New Haven."<sup>69</sup>

Daggett's story, written very implausibly as a Black man's apology to his White oppressors, is obvious racial propaganda. Goodheart and Hinks write that Daggett's racial rhetoric carried the same threads throughout his life, as evidenced by his opposition to the 1831 proposal for a Black college, as well as the fact that as chief justice, Daggett presided over the trial of Prudence Crandall. In Crandall's case, Daggett judged that "since African Americans were not citizens they had no legal standing."<sup>70</sup> Education and civic participation were tightly linked in the minds of Daggett and other colonizationists, as were race and economic power. Daggett perpetuated that amalgamation of racial fear, common in New Haven at this time. According to Brian Baaki, "Mountain's narrative should be viewed as a response to the ... immediate threat of cross-racial, proletarian revolt," with the Haitian Revolution, Shays' Rebellion, and London's Gordon Riots in its background.<sup>71</sup> While the Yale Report tied White higher education to the capacity to lead the nation toward progress, in Mountain's story, African American education leads the nation into chaos and violence.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Mountain, *Sketches of the Life of Joseph Mountain: A Negro, Who Was Executed at New-Haven, on the 20th Day of October, 1790, for a Rape, Committed on the 26th Day of May Last*, ed. David Daggett (New Haven, CT: T. and S. Green, 1790), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mountain/menu.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Lawrence B. Goodheart and Peter P. Hinks, "See the Jails Open and the Thieves Arise': Joseph Mountain's Revolutionary Atlantic and Consolidating Early National Connecticut," *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013), 498.

<sup>69</sup> Goodheart and Hinks, "See the Jails Open and the Thieves Arise," 497.

<sup>70</sup> Goodheart and Hinks, "See the Jails Open and the Thieves Arise," 519.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Baaki, "Circulating the Black Rapist: Sketches of the Life of Joseph Mountain and Early American Networks of Print," *New England Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2017), 39.



Taken together, the colonizationist activities of the authors of the Yale Report and their antipathy toward African American rights revealed their concerns about Yale's stature and New Haven's economic stability, including the supposed threat of miscegenation stemming from the African American college's proximity to women's institutions of learning in New Haven. The African American men's college proposal in New Haven suffered from the start because of the close relationship between education, Black improvement, and citizenship. It was a direct challenge to the premise maintained by Connecticut colonizationists because, as Moss writes, "if, through college education, African Americans could demonstrate that their intellectual and economic degradation was situational and not inherent, colonizationists could no longer maintain that their progress depended upon repatriation."<sup>72</sup> Colonizationists were very clear about how they perceived African American education: "At the heart of the colonizationists' project was a conviction that Northern free blacks, considered to be 'turbulent' and 'degraded,' and Southern slaves, potential runaways and insurrectionists, threatened to undermine the new nation's fragile stability."<sup>73</sup> The Black college was not only unwelcome, but it was also dangerous. The link between African American education and violence was forged powerfully, despite the fact that the only account of violence with any factual basis was that of White violence against African Americans.<sup>74</sup>

### Industrial Education and the Legacy of the Yale Report

We are the people, the genius of whose government and institutions more especially and imperiously than any other, demands that the field of classical learning be industriously and thoroughly explored and cultivated, and its richest productions gathered. The models of ancient literature, which are put into the hands of the young student, can hardly fail to imbue his mind with the principles of liberty; to inspire the liveliest patriotism, and to excite to noble and generous action, and are therefore peculiarly adapted to the American youth.<sup>75</sup>

This quote from the Yale Report describes the type of classical education its authors envisioned for White men. The fact that the African American college proposed combining classical education with vocational instruction offended both the White elite and the White working-class citizenry of New Haven.<sup>76</sup> It was also one of the apparent reasons Benjamin Silliman and Leonard Bacon opposed it. Bacon maintained that African American higher education, if it was to exist at all, should be limited.<sup>77</sup> Silliman also believed that Black education should be owned by White intentions, and that it should not go too far. One of Silliman's concerns in his remarks following the New Haven townhall meeting in 1831 was that the college's curriculum was ill-conceived

<sup>72</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," 328.

<sup>74</sup> Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves, "Yale, Slavery and Abolition," 21.

<sup>75</sup> *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 49.

<sup>77</sup> Davis, "Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1837," 667.

and radical.<sup>78</sup> It was one thing to allow African Americans to train in industrial and low-wage work, quite another to provide them with liberal education. In an environment where African American men were not considered citizens, the type of education outlined in the Yale Report was decidedly out of the question.

Colonizationists could accept only subpar educational opportunities for Black men, ones that did not compete with White progress. According to White intellectuals, industrial education and normal schooling were the most palatable options for Black men's entry into higher education. Industrial education was not supposed to compare in rigor or stature to classical education. This is underlined in the report itself, which addressed the rise of new disciplines like natural sciences and engineering and argued in defense of classical education as the foundation for all study. A proper college education, according to the Yale Report, is one that provides general training for the mind, and "not a training ground for mercantile, mechanical, or agricultural pursuits."<sup>79</sup> While the report rhetorically concedes to the importance of both, it also makes it apparent that there can only be one "superior" education: "The groundwork of a thorough education must be broad, and deep, and solid. For a partial or superficial education, the support may be of loose materials, and more hastily laid."<sup>80</sup> The outcome of such a curriculum, through the study of the classics and mental discipline, would allow the student to effectively "employ the resources of his own mind," to invent, to speculate; in short, to be free. This is precisely the type of intellectual freedom the authors of the Yale Report abhorred for Black men. Classical education, as outlined by the Yale Report, enabled self-determination. This type of superior education was not about completing one's training in a particular field, it was about lifelong learning: "[Students] should not be sent, as we think, with an expectation of *finishing* their education at the college; but with a view of laying a foundation."<sup>81</sup>

The Yale Report presents an elitist view of education, to be sure, and the passages referenced above refer to anxieties within the Yale Report about the rise of scientific and professional education, which may not have immediate racial implications. Yet it is unavoidable that while prestigious White schools, like Yale, espoused an educational philosophy for leadership, Black schools, famously Hampton and Tuskegee, had the exact opposite agenda. The educational ideals that are embodied in the Yale Report can safely be labeled as "White" ideals and, in order to define a path for some type of education for African Americans, one simply has to reverse them. Industrial education became the model for African American schooling precisely because it was a comfortable negation of the vision of the Yale Report. James Anderson writes that Samuel Armstrong's instructional model was designed to maintain the racial status quo and reinforce existing inequalities by transforming the concept of a normal schooling into something akin to a manual labor camp.<sup>82</sup> Students were expected to work long hours on the farm, not to make them skilled, but to indoctrinate them in the "dignity

<sup>78</sup> Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves, "Yale, Slavery and Abolition," 16.

<sup>79</sup> Urofsky, "Reforms and Response," 59.

<sup>80</sup> *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 33.

of labor.”<sup>83</sup> Yale’s “parental superintendence” is replaced with total physical and social control over Black students’ movements and activities.

In contrast to the rigorous academic training, testing, and recitations that were required of students in the Yale model, Hampton students worked long hours in the field, or were taught how to sew and cook (if they were women), preparing them for a subordinate social role. The long, demanding workdays took a toll on students academically. While the Yale Report suggests that higher education should be about providing what contemporaries called the “discipline and furniture of the mind,” the most accepted and praised model for African American education at this time was designed to deprive the mind, ensuring that as a result the students trained in this model are not a threat to the existing racial order. The most insidious part of Armstrong’s design is that Hampton students were then expected to become schoolteachers, messengers of an ideology that relegated Black people as the lowest working class and therefore lowest in the social and civil hierarchy. On the other hand, Yale’s students become politicians, businessmen, and leaders, exactly what a “superior” education should produce.

The differences between the Yale Report and the Hampton model are stark and apparent. While the Yale Report, as already noted, manifests a White ruling class whose virtue is to accumulate capital and perpetuate its power, the Hampton industrial model shapes a complementary subservient class that has no capital or power. Armstrong’s philosophy embraced Black people only as low-wage laborers and rejected them as civic participants. In fact, Anderson writes that “Hampton was deliberately teaching prospective black leaders and educators economic values that were detrimental to the objective economic interests of black workers.”<sup>84</sup> Setting aside the internal and external curricular pressures, which were the primary concern of the Yale Report, and looking at the document through the lens of the racial dynamics in its background, the report’s contribution to American higher education can be contrasted to the Armstrong’s model, almost as two pieces of a puzzle that fit together perfectly, ensuring a proper relationship between capitalists and workers in a racialized political economy. The only similarity, perhaps, between the Yale Report’s vision and industrial education, as practiced by Armstrong, is that they are both about a “lifelong learning” of sorts: both suggest that higher education is an extension of the nation in training citizenry and non-citizenry to occupy their respective space, or, in the case of African Americans, non-space.

It is important to connect the Yale Report not only to its time but to its legacy. The authors of the Yale Report, who were among the most celebrated scholars of their time, were participating in a larger project that has shaped the history of African American higher education. The authority of Yale as an institution and of these men has been underestimated in this regard. As scholars have pointed out, Yale was particularly influential in shaping the ideas of southern university leaders.<sup>85</sup> The notions contained and sublimated by the Yale Report traveled directly south where, according

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 52.

<sup>85</sup> Urofsky, “Reforms and Response”; see also O. Burton Adams, “Yale Influence on the Formation of The University of Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 1967), 175–85.

to Michael Dennis, a new generation of “progressive” university administrators and faculty “imparted an aura of intellectual legitimacy” to a system designed to maintain Black subservience.<sup>86</sup> In the 1890s, for example, the chancellor of the University of Georgia excoriated the idea that Blacks should be educated in the liberal arts.<sup>87</sup> Southern progressives believed that in order to transform southern society from poverty and racial conflict to economic stability and racial harmony, they needed to maintain strict educational racial hierarchy by establishing the liberal curriculum as White, and the industrial curriculum as Black. In that way, The Yale Report may have complicated Black progress by creating a lasting binary, involving some of the most famous African American educators and intellectuals, including W. E. B. Du Bois, who wrote that, indeed, “men were labeled and earmarked by their allegiance to one school of thought or the other.”<sup>88</sup>

James Levy writes that Black intellectuals oscillated between supporting industrial education and supporting classical education.<sup>89</sup> According to Levy, scholars have missed the ways in which Black progressives embraced industrial education on their own terms. Du Bois himself, in fact, grew to support aspects of industrial education over time. The point, for Levy, is that historians should be careful not to let paternalistic agendas define the narrative and, instead, closely consider how Black intellectuals sought to define new, autonomous models of intellectual and spiritual cultivation, which may have embraced industrial and pragmatic educational models.<sup>90</sup> Whether or not the negative aspects of manual education have been overstated, it is clear that the project of undoing the deep-seated ideological damage of racial politics in higher education requires a set of tools that are absent from the classical-industrial binary. This is a totally different question than the one forming the basis of the Yale Report: *What type of education can alleviate the problems of oppression, both local and global, community instability, identity ambiguity, and class conflict?* Derrick Aldridge writes that, still, “African Americans continue to lack a comprehensive, cohesive, emancipatory, and culturally relevant educational theoretical model to help them successfully navigate American society.”<sup>91</sup> Aldridge shows how deeply rooted the problems of American education are, as well as how Du Bois reached toward solutions that transcended the narrow view of the industrial-classical binary. Aldridge writes that the fruition of Du Bois’s evolution amounts to a cohesive whole: “Together, the principles of African American-centered education, communal education, broad-based education, group leadership education, Pan-Africanist education, and global education form an educational model that can provide a historical account of the African American experience

<sup>86</sup>Michael Dennis, “The Skillful Use of Higher Education to Protect White Supremacy,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 32 (Summer 2001), 115.

<sup>87</sup>Dennis, “The Skillful Use of Higher Education to Protect White Supremacy,” 118.

<sup>88</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, “Special Reprint of W.E.B. Du Bois’ ‘Education and Work,’” *Journal of Negro Education* 87, no. 3 (Summer 2018), 204.

<sup>89</sup>James Levy, “Forging African American Minds: Black Pragmatism, ‘Intelligent Labor,’ and a New Look at Industrial Education, 1879-1900,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 17, no. 1 (May 2016), 43–73.

<sup>90</sup>Levy, “Forging African American Minds,” 47.

<sup>91</sup>Aldridge, “Guiding Philosophical Principles for a Du Boisian-Based African American Educational Model,” 182.

and insight into the present conditions and problems in African American society and education.”<sup>92</sup>

The influence of some of the Yale faculty in the dissolution of the plans for the first HBCU has its own legacy. It is difficult to say how, or if, the African American college would have altered the racial landscape of New Haven, or of the nation, but it is tempting to imagine that the vision of African American-centered education, as described above, could have been explored and perhaps even realized on its own terms. A recent documentary by Tubyez Cropper and Michael Morand honors the truly revolutionary, interracial collaboration that resulted in the proposal for the Black men’s college, as well as the events that led to its rejection.<sup>93</sup> As it stands, the Black college proposal and its promise remain elusive and out of reach, overshadowed by a powerful institution and its city, as well as the contradictions of their nation. Moreover, the rejection of the African American college in New Haven is a loss for Yale, that, despite its faculty’s projections at the time, would have likely benefited from it in profound ways. This is perhaps best summarized by the words of Simeon Jocelyn, one of the architects of the proposal:

When I state an evident reason of opposition to the institution, I blush for the weakness of the strong, and the folly of the wise, as well as regret the rashness of the unreflecting. While contemplating it as a school, no men, acquainted with the fact, met us with open opposition; but when, for peculiar circumstances, it was determined to establish a *college* for the education of colored persons, the heart, the voice, the city rose against us. And why? Simply because that, by this one word, we declared more than could have been written in one hundred pages, our assurance of the equal rights of the colored man to literature, in common with other citizens. We have unwittingly touched the hidden springs of prejudice and oppression *by a word*. We have pressed the weakness of the great. We have excited the spirit of the unthinking.<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

The Yale Report of 1828 is widely regarded for its powerful defense of liberal education’s importance to modern industry and democracy. The report envisions liberal education as a commodity that will translate into personal and national success. While today’s curriculum looks very different from that of the nineteenth century, the economic rationale for higher education continues to be endemic to its role in American society. Further, the connection between education and its ability to propel American

<sup>92</sup> Alridge, “Guiding Philosophical Principles for a Du Boisian-Based African American Educational Model,” 186.

<sup>93</sup> “What Could Have Been: America’s First HBCU, New Haven, Connecticut, 1831,” directed by Tubyez Cropper, 2022, written by Tubyez Cropper and Michael Morand; produced by Beinecke Library at Yale University, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmXF3N62Olo>.

<sup>94</sup> *College for Colored Youth: An Account of the New-Haven City Meeting and Resolutions: With Recommendations of the College, and Strictures upon the Doings of New-Haven* (New York: Published by the Committee, 1831), 11–12, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2053945>.

national interests is ever more compelling in a technologically connected yet competitive and volatile global context. The document's influence necessitates an expanded reading of the Yale Report's legacy and authorship, and while scholars have noted its relationship to Jacksonian democracy, so far, scholarship has not prioritized its racial context. Written by some of the most prominent colonizationist educators of its time, the report's vision for the elite education of White Americans is clear and uncompromising. At the same time, some Yale faculty's participation in generating and amplifying racial propaganda, their role in opposing the proposed African American men's college in 1831, and their success in racializing liberal education reveal another side of their vision for American higher education.

The Yale Report is part of a larger narrative about White national progress, which is inseparable from efforts to prevent African American civic and educational advancement. The authors of the Yale Report contributed to the modernization of higher education, but they also solidified its contradictions. As a statement that speaks to the purpose and future of American higher education, the Yale Report presents an indelible problem that can be articulated as a simple question: what are the political objectives of higher education and whom do they serve? Viewing the Yale Report from its racial context, both in terms of its authors' politics, as well as the barriers they helped place on Black education, presents an opportunity to examine the uncomfortable, yet deep-rooted, relationship between American higher education and power, which the Yale Report so forcefully asserts.

**Lily Todorinova** is a part-time graduate student and full-time librarian at Rutgers-New Brunswick (MLS, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; MA English Literature, Rutgers-Newark). This essay was written as an assignment for Ben Justice's History of Higher Education course. The author would like to extend her gratitude to Dr. Justice, the HES Barnard Prize Committee, and the editorial team at HEQ.

**Disclosure statement.** The author reports no potential conflict of interest.