

King's Crowns: The History of Academic Dress at King's College and Columbia University

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Columbia University adopted cap and gown early in its history and embraced them earnestly. Its second president made gowns mandatory on campus every day, a practice that lasted until the American Revolution in 1776. They were still worn to commencements through most of the nineteenth century, their popularity ebbing and flowing, until Columbia established its own rules for academic dress in 1887, which included a scarlet gown for doctors on ceremonial occasions. It was the second coloured gown in use within the Ivy League, after Pennsylvania.

Several years later, Columbia's president hosted the meetings that led to the modern Code. The university adhered to it for sixty-eight years, longer than many of its Ivy League peers, although it tried three times to depart from it only to have each scheme defeated. Its current academic dress, which provides for gowns in a shade of medium blue for all degrees, can trace its history to the days when it was King's College in the British province of New York.

Housed in a room of Trinity Church at the foot of Wall Street, King's College started teaching its first eight students in July 1754 and received its charter from the royal governor of New York on 31 October 1754.

At its second commencement, in 1760, a newspaper reported that 'the Students and Candidates dressed in their Gowns, and uncovered, proceeded to St. George's Chapel ...'.¹ This marks the earliest mention of King's College students wearing academic dress.

A newspaper account of King's first commencement, in 1758,² mentioned that the procession included 'the Candidates for Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, with their Heads uncovered ...'.³ Although this description suggests a lack of apparel, it could be understood to refer to gowns without caps in the light of the tradition of

¹ *New-York Mercury*, 30 June 1760, in Milton Halsey Thomas, *King's College Commencement in the Newspapers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 228.

² The ceremony was cancelled in 1759 because only one candidate was prepared to graduate.

³ *New-York Mercury*, 26 June 1758, in Thomas, *Commencements*, p. 226.

granting caps only to those who have met the requirements for a degree.⁴

An illustration popular at Columbia depicts the setting of King's College around this time, amid the buildings of Trinity Church, with five students, clad in caps and knee-length gowns, walking along a path.⁵ Because the illustration is in the style of an engraving, some observers assume it dates from the eighteenth century and is therefore an artifact verifying early use of academic dress. The drawing, however, was created in 1954 for the University's bicentennial celebration and is presumably based on the artist's imagination.⁶

During the late winter of 1763, the first president of King's, Samuel Johnson, worked alongside his successor, Myles Cooper, to revise and update the college statutes. Cooper, who read for a BA at Queen's College, Oxford, 1753–56, and proceeded MA in 1760, wanted to shape King's along Oxonian lines. An Anglican priest ordained by the Bishop of Oxford, Cooper had been the chaplain of Queen's when the governors of King's College began looking for their next president. They formed a search committee,⁷ which in turn sought recommendations from, among others, the Archbishop of Canterbury,⁸ who sent Cooper's name to the presidential search committee in late 1761.⁹

Cooper arrived in New York in October 1762 as the president's assistant. Over the winter, Johnson and Cooper worked with a committee from the governors on the statute revisions. Johnson would resign sooner than he planned, at the end of Febru-

⁴ W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley refers to square caps being used by bachelors at Cambridge as early as 1559 and at Oxford by 1565, following changes made in England after the Reformation that expanded the privilege of the square cap beyond masters (*A History of Academic Dress in Europe Until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1963; repr., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 127, 89). I am indebted to Bruce Christianson for pointing this out.

Giving a master his cap was a tradition in the early years of the University of Paris (Helen Walters, *The Story of Caps and Gowns* (Chicago: E. R. Moore Company, 1939), p. 6).

'It [the academic cap] was first conferred as a symbol of the M.A. degree' (Stephen Lunce and Jerry Thompson, 'Academic Costumes and Regalia: A Brief History and Chronology', in *Texas A&M University, Spring 2007 Commencement Exercises, Saturday, May 12, 8 p.m.* Republished on-line <<http://graduation.tamu.edu/history.html>>).

⁵ A version of the illustration is available on-line at <http://www.college.columbia.edu/cct_archive/mar04/columbia250_3.php> (accessed 6 August 2011).

⁶ I am grateful to Jocelyn Wilk, public services archivist of Columbia University, for pointing this out.

⁷ David C. Humphrey, *From King's College to Columbia, 1746–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 122.

⁸ The college charter made the archbishop a member of the board of governors; he was occasionally consulted, but he appointed a proxy to attend meetings.

⁹ Cooper's name was suggested to the archbishop, Thomas Secker, by the Reverend Edward Bentham of Christ Church, Oxford (*American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, s.v. 'Myles Cooper' (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Vol. V).

ary 1763, because his second wife had died earlier in the month.

On Cooper's first day as president, 1 March 1763, the committee released its 'Plan of Education', which included the new rules. The plan, Cooper later said, was 'copied, in the most material parts, from Queen's College in Oxford'.¹⁰ The curriculum took up the most significant part of the document, but another portion was discipline and tradition based on his experience at Oxford, the only other university he was familiar with, and whose memories would have been fresh as he was only twenty-five years old.

In addition to mandating that students live on campus, the governors enacted a statute requiring academic dress. 'Each person admitted ... shall procure, within fourteen days of his entrance, a proper academical habit in which he shall always appear ...'. Any student caught without his gown would be fined 'two shillings for the first offence ...'.¹¹

Academic dress at King's seems to have been worn daily, perhaps with some amount of pride. When a student was caught 'Stealing 8 Sheets of Paper & a Pen-Knife' in 1772, he was stripped of his gown in front of his classmates and forbidden to wear his cap and gown for one week.¹²

By this time King's College had moved to its own building, nine blocks north of Trinity Church. Completed in May 1760, College Hall, a three-storey structure with a cupola, was where students ate, slept, and studied. The college occupied the north-east quarter of the block at the south-west corner of Murray and Church Streets, about 150 yards from the Hudson River.¹³

Cooper and the trustees were eager to keep students on campus and out of the city. To do so, they erected a wooden fence eight feet tall with nails on top.¹⁴ Above the fence, at a gate, sat an iron crown. (Some sources suggest it crowned the College Hall weather vane.) Representing the royal heritage of the college, the crown would become the distinctive symbol added to Columbia gowns two centuries later. In shape, the iron crown resembles St Edward's Crown,¹⁵ which is kept among the

¹⁰ Letter from Cooper to Jonathan Boucher, 22 March 1773 (misdated 1770), in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *Letters to Washington, and Accompanying Papers* (Boston: National Society of Colonial Dames of America, 1898–1902), Vol. IV, pp. 5–8, quoted in Herbert B. Howe, 'Colonel George Washington and King's College', *Columbia University Quarterly*, 24.6 (June 1932).

¹¹ *Resolutions Passed by the Trustees of Columbia College; With Brief Notices of the Action of the Board upon Important Subjects, from 1820 to 1868* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1868), p. 155.

¹² Milton Halsey Thomas, ed., *The Black Book; Or, Misdemeanors in King's College, New York, 1771–1775* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 3–4.

¹³ Humphrey, p. 112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁵ Made for the coronation of Charles II in 1661, St Edward's Crown is described as '*archée en croix*', which can be translated as arched in the form of a cross by two intersecting

Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. The iron version from the fence post is mounted on a wall in the Trustees' Room at Columbia.

Gowns also served to make students conspicuous on the streets outside campus, which attracted the sort of businesses that typically sprout near harbours and soldiers (a garrison of the king's was stationed nearby). Strictly off limits to students were the neighbourhood's gambling houses and the temptations of a red-light district that had grown in the several blocks south of King's College, where St Paul's Chapel was located. Gowns would have made easy work of identifying collegiate malefactors, who had to pass through the 'Holy Ground', the nickname for the streets where prostitutes kept their homes, on their way east to Broadway and the city's business district. At least five hundred ladies of the evening resided there, according to Patrick McRobert, a Scot who visited New York in the summer of 1774. He wrote: 'One circumstance I think is a little unlucky, is that the entrance to [King's College] is thro' one of the streets where the most noted prostitutes live.'¹⁶

Cooper and the governors may have hoped that the rules would have been enough to keep students from giving in to temptation. The prescription of gowns and the proscription against immorality, however, were not entirely effective in deterring them from the Holy Ground and its professionals.¹⁷ Cooper was aware of the student transgressors and in December 1774 noted: 'Students going without their Caps and Gowns, to be presented to the next Board of Governors.'¹⁸ The governors took the matter seriously, and in 1775 threatened with expulsion any undergraduate caught 'going without his *Academical Habit*, by *Day* or by *Night*; in *public* or in *private*'.¹⁹

No description of the gowns' shapes exists, but as many as six versions could have been in use, although without evidence this is conjecture on my part. One would have been for undergraduates; one for the AB; an undress and a full-dress gown for the MD (after the College of Physicians and Surgeons opened in 1767) and the LLD (the DM and DCL wore the same gown at Oxford); and undress and the full-dress gowns for the DD. The DD and the LLD were granted *honoris causa* and *ad eundem*. The Doctor of Laws was granted only twice by King's College,

circlets (William Jones, *Crowns & Coronations: A History of Regalia*, new edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1902), p. 33). This is also the form used by Columbia in its current logo.

¹⁶ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p 214.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 408: '... 'the Holy Ground', the red-light district whose prostitutes and brothels were well known to young men of genteel backgrounds, not least of all those enrolled at nearby Columbia College.'

¹⁸ Thomas, *Misdemeanors*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Emphases in original (ibid, p. 14).

once *honoris causa*²⁰ and once *ad eundem*, to Cooper.²¹ Cooper received his after Oxford made him a Doctor of Civil Law by diploma in 1767.²² The faculty of King's probably wore the gowns connected to their own degrees. Cooper, for one, was attached to his, and appears in his Oxford doctor's gown in his presidential portrait, 'Rev. Myles Cooper', painted by John Singleton Copley in 1768–69 (see Fig. 1).²³

After sitting for Copley, perhaps in ordinary clothes, he sent to Copley 'the Gown, Hood, and Band, by which to finish the Drapery.'²⁴ Although Cooper was annoyed by how much time Copley took to finish the painting, he was quite upset at being without his gown for so long. In January 1769 Cooper wrote to Copley: 'The want of [the portrait] cannot be attended with any great Inconvenience; but the Gown I think you are unpardonable for keeping in your Hands so long. ... I beg, Sir, you would send at least, my Gown by the first Opportunity.'²⁵

With the American war for independence brewing, King's College was about to undergo transformative changes. In early May 1775 Cooper, a British loyalist who made known his favour for the crown, quit his quarters on the college campus following anonymous threats of physical violence and took up residence on the HMS *Kingfisher*, which was anchored in the harbour, about one-half of a mile from the campus. On 25 May he left New York aboard the ship, 'just ahead of a mob bent on doing him serious harm for his Tory sentiments and alleged pamphleteering efforts on behalf of the crown'.²⁶ Commencement that year was cancelled; the ceremony

²⁰ The recipient *honoris causa* was William Tryon, who was the provincial governor of New York (N[athaniel]. F[ish]. Moore, *An Historical Sketch of Columbia College in the City of New York* (New York: Columbia College, 1846), pp. 54, 122).

²¹ Milton Halsey Thomas, ed., *Columbia University Officers and Alumni, 1754–1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 281.

²² The DCL, when granted by diploma, recognizes a significant contribution to the discipline and is an earned degree, not an honorary one. Cooper detail: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. 'Cooper, Myles (1736/7–1785)' (by James B. Bell), online edn., Jan. 2008, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50512>> (accessed 31 July 2008).

²³ Alex Kerr points out: At this date doctors (except Doctors of Music) in full dress at Oxford did not wear a hood with their robe. Cooper clearly had demanded one in his portrait. Copley seems not to have known quite what to do about it. The hood hangs down the back with the lining showing, but look how the colour of the facings of the robe has been carried up on to the neckband of the hood, as though there was a little triangle of silk there – that cannot be right, as neckbands were never reversed. While Oxford doctors do not wear their hoods with full-dress robes in Oxford itself (not even the DMus now), they often do so, unauthorized, nowadays when attending ceremonies elsewhere. Here is an example two and a half centuries ago.

²⁴ Cooper letter to Copley, quoted in Carrie Rebova et al., *John Singleton Copley in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), p. 251. I am indebted to Sarah Elliston Weiner, curator of art properties at Columbia, for putting this book in my hands.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 44–45.



Columbia University in the City of New York, Gift of the New-York Historical Society, 1820

Fig. 1.

Rev. Myles Cooper

John Singleton Copley, 1768-69. Oil on canvas, 30 inches × 25 inches

would not resume until after the war.

The college suspended classes by 6 April 1776, when College Hall was commandeered by the Revolutionary Committee of Safety for use as a military hospital. After New York fell to the British in the late summer, College Hall became a British army hospital.²⁷ King's College lived on in name only until the close of the war when a loyalist who was a former member of King's board of governors, Charles Inglis, fled to Windsor, Nova Scotia, and helped found King's College in British Canada in 1789. In 1802, George III granted a royal charter to King's College, which today is in Halifax.²⁸

After the Revolutionary War established the United States, King's was renamed Columbia College²⁹ and was reopened in 1784. A new charter was granted by the New York legislature, making Columbia a public college, and new statutes that were written in 1785 did not require students to wear gowns. Columbia returned to its roots as a private college when the legislature granted another charter on 13 April 1787, which named as its governing body a board of trustees.

Some of its traditions returned, such as academic dress. Students asked the trustees to permit them to wear gowns 'to be distinguished in their dress from the rest of their fellow citizens'.³⁰ Instead, the trustees passed a new statute on 3 December 1787, recommending that 'the president and professors of the college' wear gowns.³¹

The trustees' denial of the students' request did not dampen their interest. The students made another request of them the following summer. At a meeting of the trustees, 'A petition from several students of the college was read, setting forth their desire that an order should pass for their wearing gowns ...'. This time the trustees accepted the students' petition, passing a resolution on 25 August 1788 that for the first time acknowledges differences in academic costume but reserves for the future the right to decide which to select for Columbia. The statute reads: 'That for the present, such of the students as choose to wear gowns, be, and they are hereby, permitted to wear them; and that the board of president and professors ascertain the distinctions between the different classes until the corporation make further regulations on the subject.'³²

The president, William Samuel Johnson (the son of Samuel Johnson), would

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 49–50.

²⁸ For more on King's College in Nova Scotia, see John N. Grant, 'Many Coloured Coats: The Systems of Academical Dress in Nova Scotian Universities,' *Transactions of the Burgo Society*, 9 (2009), pp. 183–199.

²⁹ A Latin neologism derived from Christopher Columbus's surname, Columbia is a poetic name for the United States.

³⁰ Humphrey, p. 288.

³¹ *Resolutions*, p. 155.

³² Ibid., p. 9. By 'classes' the trustees were referring to the length of time students had been enrolled.

have been familiar with the Oxford dress promoted by his predecessor. W. S. Johnson received a Doctor of Civil Law degree in 1766 from Oxford, and was painted in his Oxford robe, in 1793, in a portrait by Gilbert Stuart.³³

It was not long before the trustees decided to add weight to the students' affection for gowns. On 9 April 1789, they resolved that 'the board of president and professors' could require students to wear gowns 'in such cases and under such penalties as they shall judge proper'.³⁴ It was Columbia's fourth and final gown statute of the eighteenth century, and it allowed the faculty to require academic dress at public ceremonies. A significant commencement took place just a month later.

George Washington was inaugurated the first American president on Wall Street, only ten blocks from Columbia, on 30 April 1789, a Thursday; Wednesday next, the sixth of May, President Washington attended the Columbia College graduation ceremony³⁵ at St Paul's Church in the company of Vice President John Adams and several members of the House and Senate.³⁶ It was probably the first event the new president attended outside of his governmental duties,³⁷ and it was the first university commencement with a US president in attendance.³⁸ (In modern times, sitting

³³ 'William Samuel Johnson', Gilbert Stuart, 1793, oil on canvas, 19" x 17¼", ref. PC990688, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. Johnson served as president until 1800.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 'In electing to defer entertainment under his own roof, he felt it prudent to continue public appearances temporarily ...' (Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1954), Vol. VI: *Patriot and President*, p. 200).

³⁶ 'The Annual Commencement of Columbia College was held yesterday at Saint Paul's Church in this city', an article in the *New York-Journal and Weekly Register*, 7 May 1789; transcription of clipping in Columbia University in the City of New York, University Archives, Central Files, Box 1, Folder 13: Commencement 1789. [Note: these Archives are henceforth cited as CU, UA, and these files as CF.]

³⁷ Howe, p. 139.

³⁸ No other US college within 200 miles held its commencement after Washington's inauguration and before Columbia's ceremony in 1789. In Philadelphia, the University of the State of Pennsylvania (now the University of Pennsylvania) held its commencement on 30 and 31 July. The ceremony of the College of Rhode Island (now Brown) was on 2 Sept. Yale: 9 Sept. Queen's College (now Rutgers University): 29 Sept. The College of New Jersey (now Princeton): 30 Sept. Individual dates are provided by the archives of each university.

Even if another commencement had taken place during his first week in office, the travel time to and from an out-of-town campus would have been considerable, and no absence from New York during that week is remarked upon in the authoritative biographies mentioned here. In 1773 Washington spent sixteen days traveling approximately 250 miles from his home in Mount Vernon, Virginia, to New York City, stopping often for visits and meals with friends (Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (New York: no publ., 1889–93), Vol. II, pp. 382–84, quoted in Howe, pp. 148–49). Sixteen years later, having received notice that he was the president-elect, he spent seven days travelling from Mount Vernon to New York, arriving there one week before being sworn in (James

presidents accept one or two invitations to university commencements each spring, one of which is nearly always from one of the military academies.)

Why were students so attached to this emblem of collegiate life in a bustling, rapidly growing national capital that was rebuilding after the war? New York was not the largest US city at the time (that was Philadelphia), but it was the American capital of fashion³⁹ and finance, with the nexus of American politics just blocks away from Columbia. Walking the streets of Lower Manhattan, anyone could bump into Vice President Adams, Senator John Hancock, Representative James Madison, as well as cabinet members and Revolutionary War heroes.⁴⁰

David C. Humphrey suggests the reason was New York's access to so many non-academic pastimes. Students lived in the middle of New York's social and mercantile life, near ferries that could take anyone to the rural countryside of New Jersey or Long Island for a day of riding, and still find time to return to the city for an evening of theatre or dining with friends; the adventurous could do any of these and more before or after attending class.⁴¹ 'With the distinction between college life and city life so thin,' Humphrey writes, 'it is hardly surprising that some students felt the need of gowns to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens.'⁴²

As Columbia entered the nineteenth century, the trustees and faculty let stand the existing rules on academic dress. The topic next came before them in 1827 when students asked the board to make official 'a regulation adopted by themselves

Thomas Flexner, *George Washington* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), Vol. III: *George Washington and the New Nation: 1783-1793*, pp. 173–82). He travelled an average of about thirty-five miles a day. The campus nearest to Lower Manhattan was that of Queen's College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, which is thirty-six miles away; that of the College of New Jersey, in Princeton, is forty-nine miles away. At a distance of about 215 miles, Harvard's location would have required a journey nearly equal in duration to his trip from Virginia.

Washington was busy in New York studying treasury reports, reading foreign dispatches, and conferring with the heads of departments that had existed when the Constitution was promulgated. 'Washington's first task was not to ascertain his duties but to find time in which to discharge those awaiting him' (Freeman, p. 199).

³⁹ Burrows and Wallace, p. 301.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 299. 'So many of the republic's most famous men converged in New York over the spring and summer of 1789 that the painter John Trumbull moved to the city in December to finish portraits on his monumental canvas, The Declaration of Independence.' The document had been signed in Philadelphia.

⁴¹ 'There were plenty of other things to do, however. ... two new pleasure gardens had appeared: Brannon's, near the southwest corner of present Spring and Hudson streets, and the United States, an establishment on Broadway Much frequented by students from Columbia College, Brannon's was renowned for its "curious shrubs and plants" and excellent ice cream ... ' (ibid., p. 300).

⁴² Humphrey, p. 293.

respecting the wearing of caps'.⁴³ The trustees' minutes of their meeting on 15 January record no details of the students' proposal; the trustees referred the request to the faculty, who seem to have let it wither.

However fervid the students had been for cap and gown, their passion subsided in a decade's time. A portrait of Columbia's sitting president, William Alexander Duer, hung during the fiftieth anniversary of the college's 1787 charter. In a surviving engraving, Duer wears academic dress (perhaps that of his honorary LLD, from the Regents of the University of the State of New York⁴⁴ in 1829⁴⁵), which one student chronicler referred to as his 'commencement robes', indicating that the gown may have been worn only on special occasions.⁴⁶ The engraving shows only a bust portrait. In it he wears a plain gown with no sign of facings or sleeves of a different shade. His hood appears to be tied at his chest by a tasselled cord, but whether it is tied to one of the many buttons on his coat or the cord is simply a decoration is unclear.

Sartorial demonstrations of Columbia pride sometimes attached themselves to daily wear. At the commencement ceremony in 1837, a Columbia junior noted in his diary that a classmate had used the college colours⁴⁷ to beribbon himself, one of 'several new & improved decorations' that year. '[Mancer Mark] Backus in particular made a fool of himself with a blue streamer & a white streamer, each a yard & a half long & a foot circle—tacked to his button-hole.'⁴⁸

By the middle of the century, students and their professors alike had stopped wearing gowns daily, an absence that when noticed during exams offended someone important. In a statute enacted on 5 January 1852, the trustees reminded the

⁴³ *Resolutions*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Duer held no earned degree. Note that the University of the State of New York is the name of the state's department of education and is different from the State University of New York, the academic institution, which the former oversees, together with 247 other colleges and universities in New York.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Officers*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), Vol. I: *Young Man in New York, 1835-1849*, p. 56.

⁴⁷ The colours come from early nineteenth-century student literary clubs. 'The Columbia colors, light blue and white, were appropriated from the Philolexian and Peithologian societies; the former claimed the light blue, the latter the white. When Columbia began to achieve athletic renown, the need for colours was realized and as early as 1852 this combination was adopted' (John William Robson, *A Guide to Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 196). I am grateful to John Tucker for finding this detail. Each of the societies had a library of about 2,000 volumes of current fiction and *belles-lettres*, fields lacking in the college library (editors' note in Nevins, p. 7).

⁴⁸ George Templeton Strong. Diary entry, 3 Oct. 1837. Bound Volume: Strong, George Templeton; *Diaries*, Vol. 1, 1835–2 May 1843, p. 139 (New-York Historical Society). Commencement was held at the beginning of the autumn term at this time. Strong graduated 2 Oct. 1838, second in his class; Backus finished first (Nevins, p. 87).

faculty and students that prayers must be said daily in the chapel, that professors must be present at exams, 'and that long usage requires that the professors and students shall appear at the examination in their gowns'.⁴⁹ Worn at exams, however, their many and voluminous folds can provide a hiding place for, perhaps, forbidden notes. Columbia students were upset at whispers of a faculty suggestion in 1869 that gowns should be forbidden at exams to reduce the ease of cheating.

Writing in a monthly student journal that was coincidentally named *The Cap and Gown*, the managing editor reports the rumour. In the language of the overheated undergraduate, he takes his stand. 'We would not have our Alma-Mater stooping, in her purity, to strip her sons of the insignia of their class, to prevent their dishonoring themselves.' He was bothered that the transgressions of the few would tar the many. 'Long, long before our country was named among men, the Gown was the honorable emblem of scholarship, years only added fresh honors, and to-day the Gown and the Sword rank equally as tokens of the noblest professions among men. And now it is proposed to strip our gowns from off our backs, for fear we may cheat.'⁵⁰ There is no record indicating that the threat was any more than a rumour.

Columbians' enthusiasm for gowns had been noticed on other campuses. When a Harvard College student in 1876 wanted to promote the adoption of academic dress during commencement week, he pointed to usage at Columbia. Writing in the Harvard student newspaper, he notes that at Columbia gowns were worn at the students' own choosing on a daily basis, but that at ceremonies they were worn by those taking part 'and by the orators always', and at commencement they were required of all.⁵¹ In spite of his report, no other contemporary evidence indicates whether gowns were worn daily at Columbia.

In the middle of the century the college agreed to a sort of reverse *ad eundem* approach to academic dress. Columbia had received 'certain communications from gentlemen abroad' regarding 'badges of honorary distinctions conferred by the College'. Those communications are lost; their request was denied (because it was 'without precedent' in the United States).⁵²

The gentlemen abroad may have sought permission to wear some sort of academic dress corresponding to their honorary degrees. If so, their request raises a question: why would someone who had received an honorary degree from Columbia have needed special permission to adopt cap, hood, and gown? The answer may be that at the time Columbia had no specific pattern, style or reference to any particular academic costume, and that hoods had never been part of Columbia's kit.

⁴⁹ *Resolutions*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ David B. Ogden, 'Caps and Gowns', *The Cap and Gown*, Vol. 1, no issue or page number on clipping, 20 May 1869 (CU, UA, CF, Box 33, Folder 2: Commencement).

⁵¹ 'Caps and Gowns', *The Harvard Crimson*, 20 Oct. 1876.

⁵² Minutes of the Trustees of Columbia University, Vol. IV, 3 April 1854, pp. 469–70 (CU, UA).

The honorary graduates may have been seeking some sort of costume that corresponded to academic dress where they lived.

The same report from the trustees' Committee of Honours, in April 1854, continues by recommending that the trustees say yes to a suggestion, evidently the committee's own, of a more specific plan. It would grant 'gentlemen residing within the British Empire on whom [the trustees] may have conferred their higher honorary degrees' the right to 'badges connected with corresponding degrees by the University of Oxford; provided that venerable institution shall, in comity towards Columbia College, concede to them the privilege'.⁵³

That comity seems to have been withheld. When the college conducted research thirty years later into the history and traditions of academic dress in the United States and at King's and Columbia, a Columbia trustee visited Oxford to find out if Oxford had granted King's College the right to adopt its academic dress. The answer was no, Oxford had never granted another university that right. A report to the Columbia trustees reads:

The Rev. W. B. Macray, of the Bodleian Library, who was regarded as the antiquarian of the university, stated that he had never heard of such a privilege being granted. In a note on the subject he says: 'But my inability to inform you, is to myself *prima facie* evidence against the idea suggested. I think had there been any formal concession of the kind made by the university, I should at some time or other have met with mention of it.'⁵⁴

One reason the trustees may have been seeking sartorial guidance was Columbia's absence of an official or uniform set of gown patterns.

After the American Civil War, 1861-65, when US college students were becoming more interested in the emblems of collegiate life,⁵⁵ academic dress started becoming popular for ceremonies at universities. Even so, few universities, Columbia included, had any written description or regulation for what the dress should look like.

The only contemporary survey of gowns in the United States in the nineteenth century was published in 1882 or 1883. The Reverend Thomas William Wood, who also surveyed British, Indian, and Colonial universities, records only four US uni-

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ The report is referring to William Dunn Macray, a member of the staff of the Bodleian, where he was an assistant in the department of manuscripts and wrote *Annals of the Bodleian Library Oxford with a Notice of the Earlier Library of the University*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1890, repr. 1984). Correspondence with Sue James, senior library assistant, Bodleian Library, 23 July 2008. Quotation: F. A. P. Barnard, Morgan Dix, and G. L. Rives. *Report of Select Committee on Academic Costumes*, Minutes of the Trustees, Vol. IX, pp. 391-93, 5 December 1887 (CU, UA).

⁵⁵ S[tephen]. E. Plank, 'Academic Regalia at Oberlin: the Establishment and Dissolution of a Tradition', *Northeast Ohio Journal of History*, 1 (April 2003), pp. 57-58.

versities with detailed regulations for their academic costume, including colour and material of gowns and hoods. No Ivy League university was among them.⁵⁶

His descriptions show that black gowns predominated in the United States, and that only two institutions, the General Theological Seminary, an Episcopal (Anglican) seminary in New York, and the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee (and sometimes referred to simply as ‘Sewanee’), had approved coloured gowns. Scarlet was used for General’s Doctors of Divinity. In 1872, the University of the South, which was founded and is administered by the Episcopal Church, adopted the costume protocol of Oxford, which called for clothing its Doctors of Divinity, Civil Law and Music in gowns of scarlet or, for the Doctor of Music, cream or white damask.⁵⁷ At the time, all its doctorates were honorary degrees. Graduates’ hoods, however, were for the most part trimmed differently from the Oxford traditions, departing in both edging and lining for most degrees.⁵⁸

The other two US universities with academic dress plans described in Wood were Trinity College, in Hartford, Connecticut; and Racine College, in Racine, Wisconsin, which closed in 1935.

Wood’s work is helpful in part because it becomes the source against which one can compare the work of writers who, decades later, suggest that many more US universities had specific costume plans in place, sometimes much earlier, and do so without citations. One reports that at least five universities had codes in place by 1800, which must have been a typographical error because only three of the universities on the list existed in 1800.⁵⁹ Others report that Columbia had a costume code by 1880; it is true that as recently as 1852 Columbia had required gowns

⁵⁶ T. W. Wood, *The Degrees, Gowns, and Hoods of the British, Colonial, Indian, and American Universities and Colleges* (London: Thomas Pratt and Sons, c. 1882), pp. 31–32.

⁵⁷ Honours undergraduate students at the University of the South continue to wear gowns to class on a daily basis, and their professors, in the undergraduate college, wear ‘plain black academic gowns’ to teach in (‘The Faculty Handbook, August 2005, Section IV Faculty Responsibilities, Part A, Conduct of Classes: Attire’, Sewanee: The University of the South, <http://www.sewanee.edu/Provost/FacultyManual2mst.htm#_Toc110413796> (accessed 27 Aug. 2008)).

A minimum grade point average is required to earn the right to wear a gown as an undergraduate; students who maintain a qualifying GPA may be considered for the Order of Gownsmen (David A. Lockmiller, *Scholars on Parade: Colleges, Universities, Costumes and Degrees* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 194).

Those who make it into the Order receive their gowns at a convocation held at the beginning of each semester. Gownsmen are encouraged, but not required, to wear their gowns on a daily basis (Dorie Turner, ‘Gowns in a College Town: Revered Tradition Marks University of the South’, *Chattanooga [Tennessee] Free Press*, 11 March 2006, p. 1).

⁵⁸ University of the South Archives, Proceedings of the Board, University of the South, 1872, pp. 31–32.

⁵⁹ Eleanor Truitt Weekes, ‘The History of Academic Costume’ (unpublished master’s degree thesis, Boston University, 1958), p. 43.

to be worn to examinations, but nothing in the statutes describes gowns or caps, and hoods are entirely absent.⁶⁰ Wood should not be considered the bible of mid-nineteenth-century academic dress in the United States. Given the research methods of the time, letters written to some universities may not have been answered, and the answers themselves may not have been completely accurate. The book itself is not without error. One mistake led a special committee of trustees at Columbia to repeat it in an 1887 report.⁶¹ Wood, in his section about King's College in Nova Scotia, writes that the royal charter granted by George III included his permission to adopt the academic dress of Oxford. No reference to academic dress exists in the charter, however.⁶² In fact, the text Wood quotes comes from the 1807 statutes of what was by then the University of King's College.⁶³

At the time Wood published his research, Columbia had added several colleges and degrees, from bachelor's degrees in law⁶⁴ and in engineering from the School of Mines,⁶⁵ and a Master of Arts and PhD from the Faculty of Political Science,⁶⁶ and the School of Architecture.⁶⁷

The addition of graduate schools and the PhD, both at Columbia and across the US, helped increase interest in academic dress.⁶⁸ But even with the additional

⁶⁰ George K. Schweitzer, *The Doctorate: A Handbook* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas, 1965), p. 64; Mary Taylor, 'Commencement Procedure', *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars*, 10 (July 1935), p. 311.

⁶¹ *Report of the Select Committee*, p. 3.

⁶² George III, 'Royal charter establishing Kings College at Windsor in the Province of Nova Scotia', granted 12 May 1802, archived in the University of King's College Archives. A typescript version is available at <http://www.ukings.ca/files/purple_book.pdf> (accessed 3 Nov. 2008).

⁶³ 'The Statutes, Rules and Ordinances, of the University of King's College at Windsor in the Province of Nova Scotia', manuscript, 1807, Book 3, Title 5, §2, pp. 65–66. Section 1 requires: 'The dress of all the members of the University shall be plain, decent, and cleanly, without lace, or any other expensive, or coxcomical, ornaments.'

⁶⁴ The School of Law was founded in 1858.

⁶⁵ Established 1864, and known today as the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science.

⁶⁶ Founded in 1880, known today as the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Columbia had attempted to start a three-year master's programme in 1857, with degrees in letters, science and jurisprudence, but the effort was halted in April 1861 for a lack of applicants and the onset of the Civil War. The effort was reincarnated as the Faculty of Political Science, in 1880 (McCaughey, pp. 137–38).

⁶⁷ Founded in 1881, today the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Wood includes the MD as a Columbia degree, but it had not been conferred by Columbia for almost seventy years. The College of Physicians and Surgeons, founded at King's College in 1767, was closed by the trustees in 1813 (McCaughey, p. 185) and reconstituted as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York in 1814 (Humphrey, p. 262). It would return to Columbia's fold in 1891.

⁶⁸ Lockmiller, p. 181.

degrees Columbia still had no official guide for how the corresponding costumes should look.

By the 1884 commencement ceremony, after more than a century of enthusiasm for the gown, 'there was a notable absence of display.' Of a total 165 candidates for degrees, including Bachelors of Arts, Bachelors of Philosophy in chemistry or in architecture, Bachelors of Engineering, and including twenty-two Masters of Arts and six Doctors of Philosophy, fewer than six wore gowns; only the college president, Frederick A. P. Barnard, wore a cap.⁶⁹

Those graduates who were not wearing caps and gowns likely wore a swallow-tail coat or dress suit.⁷⁰ In the Midwest and Southeast regions of the US, student speakers wore dress suits and the university president wore a Prince Albert suit.⁷¹ At Harvard in the 1870s, full evening dress was worn even though commencement took place before noon, an affront to fashion not unnoticed by undergraduates. 'An evening dress, worn as a morning costume, is manifestly absurd, and its inappropriateness undeniable,' the Harvard student newspaper noted.⁷²

Columbia's first academic dress descriptions: 1887

Columbia finally defined each degree's academic dress in 1887, ninety-nine years after the trustees had noted that they would 'ascertain the distinctions between the different classes' before making a decision. The new costume code was preceded by three years of study conducted by a committee that was deemed sufficiently significant to have as its members the university president, Barnard; an alumnus of

⁶⁹ 'Columbia's Newest Class: The 130th [sic] Commencement.' Unnamed newspaper clipping, 12 June 1884. 'Columbia University Commencements 1870-1889', a scrapbook of ephemera and clippings (CU, UA).

⁷⁰ Gardner Cotrell Leonard, *Encyclopedia Americana*, quoted in Taylor, p. 312.

⁷¹ 'A Modern History of Cap and Gown', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 May 1921, quoted in 'Whence the Cap and Gown?' *Columbia Alumni News*, 12 (June 1921), pp. 554-55. The jacket of a Prince Albert suit is similar to a modern men's suit coat but extends nearly to the knees and its top button is generally near the breast bone.

⁷² 'Caps and Gowns', *The Harvard Crimson*, 20 Oct. 1876.

At about this time, judges in the city of New York resumed wearing gowns when they held court. Having given them up after the Revolution to show their independence from Britain, the judges of the New York State Court of Appeals resumed wearing them on 25 February 1884 after a prominent lawyer, David Dudley Field, asked them to do so, saying, 'The garment is no more a badge of monarchical than of republican office' (John Eligon, 'Behind the Gavel, a Sense of Style: Forgoing the Robes, or Accessorizing for a Bit of Flair', an interview with Albert M. Rosenblatt, a retired judge who is president of the Historical Society of the Courts of the State of New York, *The New York Times*, 6 Sept. 2008, p. C2). The robes were black silk. 'The innovation is generally commended by the Bar. Each Judge pays for his own robe' ('Judges in Silken Robes', an exceptionally brief article in *The New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1884, p. 2).

Columbia College and the Law School, George L. Rives; and the rector of Trinity Church, the Reverend Dr Morgan Dix; all were trustees. Rives had studied at the University of Cambridge.⁷³

One of the three visited England (he does not identify himself), where he met at Oxford with Macray, who suggested adopting a 'distinct national badge' that would refer to its English antecedents and royal foundation.⁷⁴ Both would eventually come to be: US universities would create a 'distinct national badge' and Columbia would place a crown, representing its royal English heritage, on its gowns.

The three men reviewed Wood's book on gowns and hoods and other unspecified material, and stated that they had examined the traditions of fifty universities in 'Great Britain and her Asiatic, Australian, and American colonies, and in the United States'.⁷⁵

The committee delivered its report on 7 February 1887. They had uncovered no US guidelines governing academic dress and noted that the distinctions of the time 'seem to have been made arbitrarily and often capriciously', leaving it impossible to tell one university from another, much less one faculty or degree from another. Their solution was to 'make the graduates of the College distinguishable both as to their faculties and as to their degrees'.⁷⁶ The trustees agreed to the proposals on 5 December 1887, for the first time codifying caps, gowns, and hoods for the bachelor, master, and doctor, as well as their hoods.⁷⁷

The descriptions are maddeningly vague. Gowns are described thus: 'Pattern. The form to be that commonly worn, with open sleeves.' Perhaps the master's gown had no glove sleeves.

The gowns' material was of 'worsted stuff or silk for ordinary wear. Cassimere for dress of ceremony'.⁷⁸ All the gowns were black, except for the ceremonial scarlet gowns of doctors of all faculties, making Columbia one of at least six US universities that would sanction non-black gowns during the nineteenth century. (The others

⁷³ McCaughey, p. 278. In December 1887 Rives would become the assistant secretary of state in the US State Department, having been appointed by US President Grover Cleveland (in his first administration).

⁷⁴ Report of Select Committee, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Trustees, 5 Dec. 1887, Vol. IX, pp. 391–93.

⁷⁸ Cassimere, from the word cashmere, is a medium-weight fabric, usually wool, that is woven, smooth, and twilled. Its weave was patented by Francis Yerbury of Bradford in 1766. In the nineteenth century, it was made in Hartford, Connecticut, and in Lowell and Melville, Massachusetts. (Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650–1870: A Dictionary Based on Original Documents, Prints and Paintings, Commercial Records, American Merchants' Papers, Shopkeepers' Advertisements, and Pattern Books with Original Swatches of Cloth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), p. 192.)

were Sewanee, New York, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Hampton-Sydney.⁷⁹)

The bachelor's gown was untrimmed. The master's gown had black velvet facings on the front and three black velvet horizontal bars on each sleeve, like the modern American doctor. It is unclear if the American use of this style of trim—three sleeve bars in velvet, along with velvet facings—originated at Columbia, but it had already existed there for two decades, at least in pictorial form.⁸⁰

Twenty-two years earlier, an invitation to attend class day activities with the Columbia College Class of 1865 was illustrated with a drawing of an academic gown hanging from a peg with three stripes on its sleeve.⁸¹ Unfortunately, there is no evidence of such a gown having been worn at the time. What could have been the source for the stripes? One possible antecedent is Cambridge, where three chevrons are on the sleeves of the undergraduate gowns of the fellow commoner (in gold or yellow) and pensioner (in black or dark blue) of Clare Hall, in the Whittock illustrations.⁸² A second influence may have been the University of London, which included a black velvet crescent on the sleeves of the MA and doctors from 1844 until around 1862.⁸³ Another possible source was the Civil War. Princeton trustee John McCook, the person who pushed for uniform academic dress before Leonard, had served as an officer for the Union during the war, during which he learned the usefulness of identifying soldiers by their insignia.⁸⁴

The Columbia doctor's gown for ordinary dress had facings and three sleeve bars of purple velvet. For the doctor's full-dress robe, the faculty colour was used on the facings, and it also 'lined in the sleeves with silk or satin'. No mention is made of sleeve bars on the full-dress robe; they were probably left off, for the presidential portrait of Barnard, who led Columbia from 1864 to 1889, shows him seated in an open scarlet gown with pinkish facings and sleeve linings, which was the colour of the faculty of law; the sleeves, which appear to be long and pointed, have no bars. He wears no hood.⁸⁵ (See Fig. 2.)

⁷⁹ See ICC, pp. 10–11.

⁸⁰ The Columbia document offers no explanation for the sleeve bars.

⁸¹ Photograph in The New York Times Photo Archives, Columbia University folder.

⁸² Nathaniel Whittock, *The Costumes of the Members of the University of Cambridge* (London: Whittock, c. 1843; and reprinted by other publishers). Clare Hall changed its name to Clare College in 1856; the institution now known as Clare Hall Cambridge was founded in 1966.

⁸³ Nicholas Groves, "'With Velvet Facings': The Original London Robes", *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 5 (2005), p. 76.

⁸⁴ Donald L Drakeman makes the point in Stephen Wolgast, ed., 'The Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), pp. 14–15.

⁸⁵ Barnard is the namesake of Barnard College, the women's college of Columbia University. He championed co-education, but the trustees did not support his idea. When Barnard College opened in 1889, it became the first secular institution in New York City to grant the BA to women (Burrows and Wallace, p. 1087). He held several honorary degrees: LLD,



Columbia University in the City of New York, Commissioned by the Trustees

Fig. 2.

Frederick A. P. Barnard

Eastman Johnson, 1886. Oil on canvas, 49 inches × 39½ inches

The committee's investigation into hood variety, it could be said, was less than exhaustive. The complete regulation regarding hood shape: 'Pattern. The usual pattern, there being no material variety of form among different universities.'

The material was the same as the gown, except for the doctor's full dress hood, which was made of velvet. The exterior of all hoods was black. The interior was lined in silk or satin with faculty colours, of which there were five:

Arts, Letters, and Philosophy	White
Laws	Pink
Science	Gold yellow
Theology	Blue
Medicine	Green

Other than bachelors, who had no edging or binding, hoods were trimmed according to degree. Masters had scarlet edging 2 inches wide in the gown material. Doctors had white fur edging (no specific fur or width is mentioned).

The cap for all degrees was a black mortar-board; a black silk tassel is specified for bachelors and masters, and a tassel of gold thread for doctors.

In 1888 Columbia granted to its scholars and faculty whose degrees were granted elsewhere *ad eundem* privileges to wear Columbia dress.⁸⁶ When the costume code was printed in the university statutes in 1892, after a five-year delay between approval and publication, it omitted the doctor's ceremonial gown.⁸⁷ The scarlet gown had been worn only rarely, usually by the president or other university officers when participating in a university celebration in the United States or Europe, such as a centennial anniversary.⁸⁸ Columbia evidently had few, if any, occasions of its own at which the robe intended for 'dress of ceremony' was worn. It had lasted five years.

At the inauguration of Seth Low as Columbia's president in 1890, Low and some trustees wore black silk gowns and square caps, but the chairman of the trustees did not; students wore 'ribbon slips' in the school colours instead of academic dress to the ceremony,⁸⁹ which was held off campus at the Metropolitan Opera House.⁹⁰

Jefferson College (Mississippi) 1855; AM, LLD, Yale '58; STD, University of Mississippi '61; LHD, Regents of the University of New York State '72; DCD, King's College (Nova Scotia) '87; PhD, St John's College (Annapolis, Maryland) '88 (*Columbia University General Catalogue of Officers and Students, 1916* (New York: Columbia University in the City of New York, 1916), p. 24).

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Trustees, Vol. IX, 4 June 1888, p. 470.

⁸⁷ Columbia College in the City of New York, *Revised Statutes, July First, 1892* (New York: Printed for the College, July 1892), ch. 19, p. 35.

⁸⁸ 'Gowns for College Men: Academic Costumes in American Universities', *The New York Times*, 26 April 1896.

⁸⁹ 'Columbia's Keys are His: Seth Low Installed in the Presidential Office', *The New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1890.

⁹⁰ The Metropolitan was then located on Broadway between West 39th and West 40th

While Columbia was not aware of the variety of British hood shapes, the possibilities were not lost on one of Columbia's New York cousins. When the University of the City of New York (the predecessor of New York University) began including in its 1891 catalogue a section on academic costume, it had clearly looked into the matter. The entry authorizes 'gowns, hoods and caps ... the patterns suggested being those of Edinburgh'.⁹¹ Eleven years later Harvard would adopt hoods of the Edinburgh shape.⁹²

Adoption of the Intercollegiate Code and departures from it

Seth Low, Columbia's president, hosted the meetings that created the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume. The document was agreed to in 1895. Columbia adopted the commission's costume guide that year on 7 October, and when the new (and current) campus was dedicated seven months later,⁹³ a group of trustees had written that caps and gowns would add 'dignity and importance' to the ceremony.⁹⁴ Students, faculty, and trustees were requested to wear academic dress, marking perhaps the first time the new outfits were worn at Columbia. In 1898 the trustees gave the faculty the right to require academic dress at commencement.⁹⁵

Within several years most US universities had agreed to the group's proposal, most of them strictly adhering to it for more than fifty years with few exceptions. Two early strays were Ivy League universities.

When the Harvard Corporation adopted its academic dress statute⁹⁶ on 8 December 1902, it followed the principles of the Code but not all the details. Harvard added an embroidered double crow's foot to the front panels of its gowns, one on each side, just below the yoke, in the graduate's faculty colour because all hoods

Streets, one mile south of its current location.

⁹¹ *The University of the City of New York: Catalogue and Announcements 1891–1892*, p. 193. The word 'authorizes' is important in that the trustees did not allow the chancellor to require academic costume: 'Resolved that the Chancellor is empowered to authorize, but without anything being made in any sense obligatory, a form of gown and cap for commencements and other formal occasions' (Minutes of the Trustees of the University of the City of New York, 4 April 1892 (New York University Archives)). Since the catalogue had been published the previous year, the trustees' official approval was probably a formality.

⁹² Hugh Smith, assisted by Kevin Sheard, *Academic Dress and Insignia of the World: Gowns, Hats, Chains of Office, Hoods, Rings, Medals and Other Degree Insignia of Universities and Other Institutions of Learning* (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1970), Vol. II, p. 1602 and Plate 431.

⁹³ On 2 May 1896.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Trustees, Vol. XVI, 2 March 1896, p. 108.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7 March 1898, Vol. XVII, p. 60.

⁹⁶ Mason Hammond, 'The Academic Costume Worn by the President of Harvard University' (unpublished manuscript, c. 1985, Harvard University Archives, HUB 3100), p. 6.

were (and are today) black lined with crimson.⁹⁷ This little touch of needlework inspired colleges and universities decades later, when unique academic dress grew in popularity, to adorn their gowns similarly.⁹⁸

Harvard's written regulation on hoods departed from the Code three ways: the length of the master's hood, which was three and a half feet (instead of four feet); the shape of the doctor's hood, which is a simple shape, and in giving the hoods nothing to indicate the faculty (the crow's feet performed that job).⁹⁹ When the Code was changed in 1936, it adopted the Harvard length for masters' hoods.

Although the hood's shape is unspecified in the Harvard regulation, it adopted the Edinburgh shape, which is the fourth way Harvard's hood is different. The doctor's hood has no cape; the regulation silent on the question of simple or full shape.¹⁰⁰ For all degrees, the cap was the mortar-board in black cloth with a black tassel, but professors and members of the University Council were allowed the square soft cap of velvet.¹⁰¹

Among the Ivy League universities, caps and gowns remained black in accordance with the Code until 1912, when the governing body of Brown University, the Corporation, passed a law that specified the mortar-board worn by the two branches of the corporate administration, the trustees and the fellows, be in the university colour, seal brown velvet. Gowns and hoods remained black, as did caps for all other faculty and students.¹⁰²

By 1933 Columbia was considering a decoration to the robes of all graduates in the style of Harvard. Columbia chose the iron crown that refers the royal founding

⁹⁷ Examples of the crow's feet are in Nicholas A. Hoffmann, 'Crow's Feet and Crimson: Academic Dress at Harvard', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 9 (2009), p. 48.

⁹⁸ Examples range from the simple, such as Brown's outline of a shield with a cross, to the fairly elaborate, such as the 1950s Syracuse University chancellor's gown, which used two patches: one the seal of the state of New York, the other the seal of the University. When Syracuse inaugurated a new chancellor in 2004, her gown bore two identical patches showing the university seal. A modern example of two different patches can be seen on the St Louis University doctor's gown, which has the University seal on one patch and the University symbol, a fleur-de-lys, on the other.

⁹⁹ G[eorge]. P. Baker, 'The Spring Term', *The Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, *The Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, 11 (June 1903), pp. 541–42.

¹⁰⁰ The text: 'Hoods. For all ordinary degrees: black, the material being that of the gown [worsted stuff for bachelors, black silk or worsted stuff for masters, doctors, LL.B. and S.T.B.], lined with crimson silk; three feet long for Bachelors, three and one half for Masters, four for Doctors and the degree of LL.B. and S.T.B. For honorary degrees: black cloth lined with crimson silk.' Ibid., p. 542.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² 'Through the years the designation "beef-eater" has been incorrectly used to describe the hats of the Corporation' (*Encyclopedia Brunoniana*, s.v. 'Academic Costume' (by Martha Mitchell)), <http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/> (accessed 11 Dec. 2008).

of King's College. The notion would not gain approval for thirty years, but not for lack of a powerful patron. Letters written among university officers and to and from Cotrell & Leonard indicate that the interest in 'brightening up a bit the somberness of the dark gowns' came from the top.¹⁰³

Nicholas Murray Butler had been the university president for thirty-one years and was a renowned figure across the United States. Attending his inauguration in 1902 was US President Theodore Roosevelt, who had studied at the Columbia Law School. During Butler's Columbia tenure, his name was placed among the Republican nominees for president of the United States in 1919; he had been appointed president of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace in 1925; and he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 (which he shared with Jane Addams) for his advocacy on behalf of the 1928 Pact of Paris (the Kellogg-Briand Pact).¹⁰⁴ As a student at Columbia he had earned his BA, MA, and PhD in the 1880s. As president of Columbia he was granted honorary degrees by Cambridge (LLD), Oxford (DLitt), Paris (DHon), and thirty-four other universities.

'I have long wanted to suggest that we should establish the practice a having a small King's Crown embroidered in light blue on our academic gowns, as Harvard has their symbol in crimson,' Butler wrote to the university secretary on 4 June 1934.¹⁰⁵ (He mistakenly thought that Harvard's crow's feet were in the university colour.)

Butler had spoken with the university secretary, Frank D. Fackenthal, about adding a crown more than a year earlier. In late April 1933, Fackenthal was in touch with Cotrell & Leonard to ask for details on the Harvard crow's feet and if any other university's gowns were similarly adorned.¹⁰⁶ The robemaker wrote back to report that it knew of no other university with any insignia on its gown, but that St Stephen's College,¹⁰⁷ an Episcopal college in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., had used

¹⁰³ Letter from Frank Fackenthal, university secretary, to Harold W. Bentley, the Columbia bookstore manager, 13 Dec. 1935 (CU, UA, CF, Box 22, Folder 5: Ba 1935–36).

¹⁰⁴ Michael Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous: The Amazing Career of the Redoubtable Dr Nicholas Murray Butler* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2006), pp. 282, 353, 373–77.

¹⁰⁵ Memo from Butler to Fackenthal, 4 June 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 487, Folder 1: Butler).

¹⁰⁶ Memo from Fackenthal to Butler, 24 April 1933 (CU, UA, CF, Box 481, Folder 13).

¹⁰⁷ St Stephen's is now called Bard College. St Stephen's College was founded in 1860 as an Episcopal seminary, and became a liberal arts college in 1863 (David Allan Robertson, ed., *American Universities and Colleges* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 598–99). In 1928 it became affiliated with Columbia University, a relationship that lasted until it began admitting women in 1948 (McCaughy, p. 271). Under Columbia's agreement with Barnard College, no other undergraduate college could grant degrees to women (Reamer Kline, *Education for the Common Good: A History of Bard College, The First 100 Years, 1860–1960* (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Bard College, 1982), p. 117).



**Bard College Archives and
Special Collections**

**Fig. 3. St Stephen's
gown, 1929.**

crowns as recently as 1929 without changing their colour to match the degree.¹⁰⁸ (See Fig. 3.) Students and faculty at St Stephen's wore gowns daily to class, academic meetings, and to chapel¹⁰⁹ in the 1920s.¹¹⁰ The crown on the gowns itself appears to be elongated horizontally and may have referred to the crown on the college seal although they bear no resemblance to one another.¹¹¹

In the spring of 1934, Fackenthal wrote to Cotrell & Leonard again. He included a sketch based on Columbia's eighteenth-century crown and asked how big it should be.¹¹² The answer was 1½ inches by 1½ inches, but a detail of the embroidery method set back the process for decades.

Cotrell & Leonard explained that the intricacy of the crown's design would require it to be embroidered on a sturdy piece of fabric that would then be sewed to the gown.¹¹³ Fackenthal wrote back wondering why the embroidery could not simply be applied to the gown itself. 'No doubt you

had the Harvard crowsfeet in mind,' came the answer from Albany, written by a Mr M. Maerklein. 'These ... few simple loops are small and even and are easily held together at the stem.' By contrast, the crowns are embroidered, and 'all embroidered work needs to be placed on some material,' he wrote.¹¹⁴

By the autumn, Fackenthal asked Cotrell & Leonard for a sample.¹¹⁵ It was

¹⁰⁸ Letter from E. B. Class, Cotrell & Leonard, to Fackenthal, 25 April 1933 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 8: Co 1932–33).

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Bernard I. Bell, warden (i.e. president) of St Stephen's College, to the faculty, 12 September 1929 (Bard College Archives and Special Collections).

¹¹⁰ Kline, p. 96. "On the Oxford plan" was one of [president of St Stephen's] B[ernard] I. Bell's favourite phrases with which to describe the College' (ibid.).

¹¹¹ After St Stephen's became Bard College, it created a new seal around 1956 that borrowed a crown to refer to St Stephen's. The crown on the new seal is identical to the Columbia College crown (Bard College Archives and Special Collections, Commencement Folder, Box 1: Commencement programs from 1917 and 1956).

¹¹² Letter from Fackenthal to E. B. Class, Cotrell & Leonard, 6 June 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 10, Co 1933–34).

¹¹³ Letter from M. Maerklein, Cotrell & Leonard, to Fackenthal, 29 June 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 10, Co 1933–34).

¹¹⁴ Letter from M. Maerklein, Cotrell & Leonard, to Fackenthal, 11 July 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 12: Co 1934–35).

¹¹⁵ Letter from Frank Fackenthal to Cotrell & Leonard, 19 Oct. 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 12: Co 1934–35).

mailed on the last day of October, by coincidence the university's 180th anniversary, and arrived on Fackenthal's desk the next day.¹¹⁶

Stitched in two colours, this first version of the crown was more detailed than any that followed. (See Fig. 4.) Pale blue thread (which has faded almost to silver) is used for the crown. Medium blue is used for highlights in the four circles that represent jewels, four horizontal bands on the base, and the orb atop the crown. The outer edges of the crown have four circles on each side, in pale blue. Cotrell & Leonard's price was \$1.50 per pair, which at \$25 per pair in 2011 reflects the extent of the detail in the needlework.¹¹⁷

But the sample arrived too late. On 2 November 1934, Butler wrote a memo to Fackenthal to say that he no longer wanted to pursue the crown. 'It is too late in the day to effect a change, even if it were desirable, in what has now become an established custom.'¹¹⁸ Fackenthal passed on the news to Cotrell & Leonard the same day.

One year later, however, Fackenthal resumed his inquiry. On 13 November 1935, he wrote to Jerome Greene, the secretary to the Harvard Corporation (the governing body) to figure out if a Columbia crown would really need to be embroidered on separate fabric. Greene confirmed the Cotrell & Leonard proposition and offered his opinion that 'the King's Crown would be a very appropriate and distinctive variation on the "crow's-foot," though it might not lend itself so readily to being made out of silk cord. It might have to be embroidered on a square of black cloth of the same material as the gown and sewed on.'¹¹⁹

Undeterred, Fackenthal wrote back immediately, offering his opinion that the look of the crow's feet on Harvard gowns was 'just right' and that he would seek a similar solution for Columbia.¹²⁰ In January 1936 he visited the manager of the Columbia bookstore (it owned the university's stock of rental costume) to discuss



University Archives, Columbia University

Fig. 4. Embroidered crown proposal, Cotrell & Leonard, 1933.

¹¹⁶ Letter and embroidered crown sample from M. Maerklein, Cotrell & Leonard, to Fackenthal, 31 Oct. 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 48, Folder 10: Co 1933–34).

¹¹⁷ Inflation calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor <<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>>.

¹¹⁸ Memo from Butler to Fackenthal, 2 Nov. 1934 (CU, UA, CF, Box 487, Folder 1: Butler).

¹¹⁹ Letters between Frank Fackenthal and Jerome Greene, 13 and 14 Nov. 1935 (CU, UA, CF, Box 110, Folder 3: G 1935–36).

¹²⁰ Letter from Fackenthal to Greene, 15 Nov. 1935 (ibid.).

an alternative idea. If the crowns were smaller than the 1½ inch-square size, could they be embroidered directly onto the gowns?

The bookstore manager, Harold W. Bentley, did not think so. Samples of crowns embroidered on velvet, silk, and cotton poplin, probably prepared by Cotrell & Leonard, had been delivered earlier that month to Bentley,¹²¹ who wrote to Fackenthal: 'From the frayed condition of the crowns having no background to support them, it seems quite evident that some background material will have to be used if the crown is to be adopted.'¹²²

Only one colour, light blue, is used in these crowns, which are about 7/8 inch wide by 5/8 inch tall, about half the size of the first sample. Because they are embroidered directly onto the fabric, they look as if they are smudged. The sample on poplin holds up better, but all of these are so small that they would have been visible as crowns only if one were standing directly in front of the wearer. The orb has disappeared, and the total number of 'jewels' has been cut in half, to six.

As an alternative, Bentley suggested using tassels in faculty colours, which New York University planned to implement at commencement that spring.¹²³ By then, however, even Fackenthal had tired of the idea. In a letter of one sentence only, he wrote: 'The matter of crown embroidery on the gowns is being laid aside indefinitely.'¹²⁴ It was an abrupt conclusion to three years of work.

He informed Butler on the same day. 'The crow's-foot which Harvard uses seems to be just different enough in character to be practical, where the crown design is not.'¹²⁵ At the bottom of the letter is Butler's handwritten note: 'Odd that—I wonder why—NMB.' It was a good question, one Fackenthal did not explain. He never accepted the needle worker's need for sturdy material on which to embroider the crown.

While Columbia dallied Yale moved ahead. In the first change to Ivy League academic dress since Brown's caps went brown in 1912, the Yale Corporation approved gowns in Yale Blue, a dark blue,¹²⁶ for its masters and doctors on 14 May 1938. They were given the choice of black or Yale Blue in silk gowns that otherwise matched the Code's standards. For the doctor in a black gown, the sleeve bars could be black or the faculty colour; for the doctor in Yale Blue, the sleeve bars were

¹²¹ The samples are in an envelope (CU, UA, CF, Box 97, Folder 6: F 1935–1936).

¹²² Letter from Bentley to Fackenthal, 18 Jan. 1936 (CU, UA, CF, Box 22, Folder 5: Ba 1935–36).

¹²³ Letter from Bentley to Fackenthal, 5 March 1936 (*ibid.*).

¹²⁴ Letter from Fackenthal to Bentley, 9 March 1936 (*ibid.*).

¹²⁵ Memo from Fackenthal to Butler, 9 March 1936 (CU, UA, CF, Folder 481, Box 18).

¹²⁶ In printing, Yale calls for a mix of 100% Cyan, 75% Magenta, 8% Yellow, and 40% Black ('Yale's Visual Identity: The Yale Colors', on the Yale web site <<http://www.yale.edu/printer/identity/yaleblue.html>> (accessed 14 Sept. 2011)).



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Fig. 5. Recession in 1936.

always black.¹²⁷

Since the adoption of the Code, Yale was the first Ivy League university to grant graduates the privilege of a coloured gown. (Columbia had done so in 1887, but eliminated its doctors' scarlet dress gown in 1892.) Yale bachelors, however, had no choice but black. University regulations stated that no candidates for degrees were to wear hoods at commencement.

Columbia gown revision proposal: 1948

After the Second World War, two significant revisions to Columbia's academic dress were proposed, drawn up, reviewed, and, ultimately, abandoned.

When Butler retired in 1945, Fackenthal became the acting president. He asked for a revision to the academic dress code in 1947, suggesting that 'our public ceremonies would be more colorful if the chief participants wore distinctive academic

¹²⁷ [Pamphlets and clippings on academic costume at Yale] (Archives of Yale University, Oversize, Y76 1).

costume'.¹²⁸ The embroidered crowns that he had worked on were not included; instead, a metal crown on a chain was proposed for the chairman of the board of trustees and for the deans. An alternative was described in a letter to a silversmith, in which the pendant would depict the university seal. In either case, the necklace's design was to be 'similar to those worn by city officials in England'.¹²⁹ University officers around the world are among those who often wear chains of office.

Two pages of rough, preliminary drawings remain from the proposal. The artist, whose name is unrecorded, had consulted Combe's history of Cambridge, a copy of which was in the Columbia libraries,¹³⁰ as was Combe's history of Oxford.

The page with the fellow-commoner's gown (see Fig. 6) includes three different colour blockings for gowns, what may be the loops of a necklace, and three different styles of tassel. A drawing labelled 'oversleeve' seems to show an aiguillette and an epaulette. In the centre, the largest drawing, labelled 'Frogs', shows three frogs on a gown's sleeve and five on the lower, side portion of the gown. They do not appear to have actually fastened anything, and therefore were probably frogs only in decoration instead of function.

It is this page with the reference to Combe's Cambridge history. The fellow-commoner's gown above the notation, however, looks more like the dress robe of the Oxford Doctor in Law or Physic in Combe's Oxford history, with sleeve cuffs and facings in a colour that contrasts with the body of the robe itself.¹³¹

The other page of sketches includes one captioned as a nobleman's gown (see Fig. 7), which corresponds in part with the Cambridge nobleman's gown described by and depicted in Combe.¹³² While the Columbia illustration depicts red embroidery and facings on a black gown, the Combe illustration shows gold embroidery on a purple gown. Further, the Combe gown has long panel sleeves, squared at the bottom, while those on the illustration look like bell sleeves.

Sketches on the rest of the page include what appear to be two different hood neckbands, two different epaulettes with a crown on each, a necklace with a pendant (labelled 'chain'), and sketches of aiguillettes with a colour scheme listed, identical to the one proposed for marshals (*infra*, p. 111).

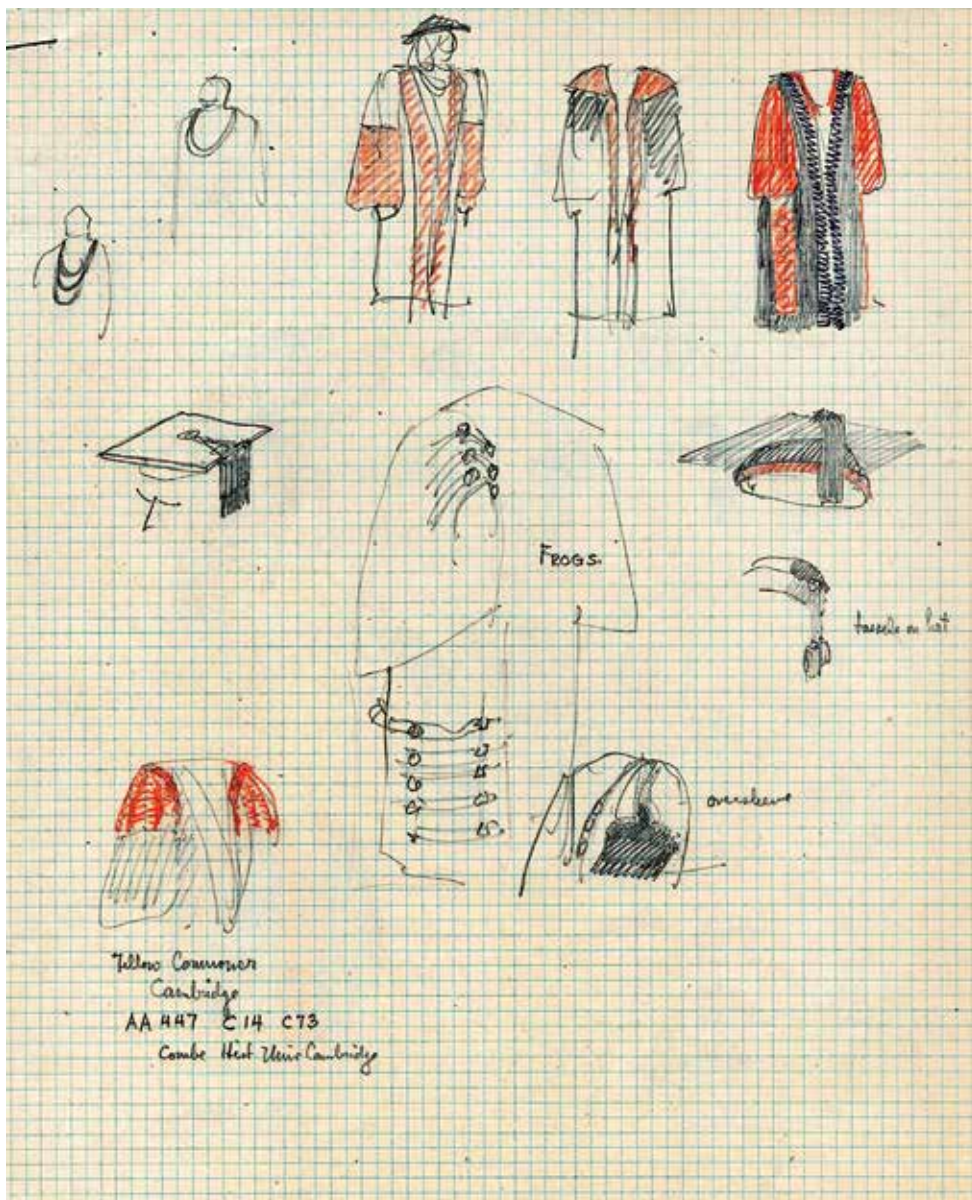
¹²⁸ Letter from Albert C. Jacobs, assistant to the president, to Richard Herpers, 26 June 1947 (CU, UA, CF, Box 383, Folder 5: Jacobs).

¹²⁹ Letter from Richard Herpers, assistant to the chairman of the trustees, to William H. Wefferling, of Wefferling, Berry & Co., 9 Feb. 1948 (CU, UA, CF, Box 301, Folder 18: We 1947-48).

¹³⁰ Indeed, the letters and numbers on the sheet of drawings above 'Combe Hist Univ Cambridge' are the call number for the Cambridge book in the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia. The Avery Library uses call numbers of its own creation.

¹³¹ William Combe, *History of the University of Oxford* (London: Ackermann, 1814), Vol. II, p. 260, and Plate III.

¹³² *Id.*, *History of the University of Cambridge* (London: Ackermann, 1815), Vol. II, p. 313, and Plate VIII.



University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York
 Fig. 6. Preliminary sketch [page A], 1948.

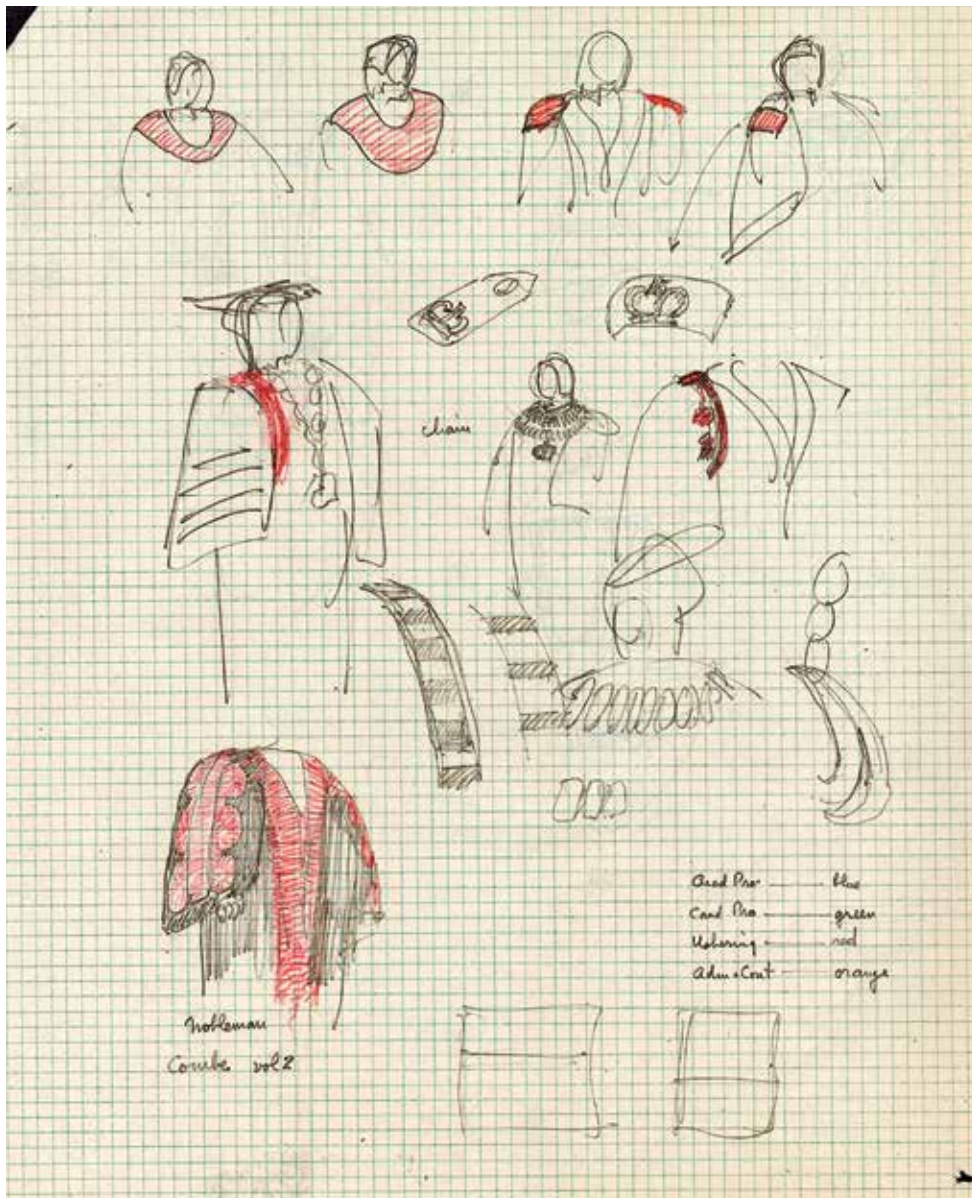




Fig. 8. Chairman proposal, 1948.



Fig. 9. Mace bearer proposal, 1948.

University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York

One of the sketches made it to a final design. The gown at the top centre of Fig. 6 became the dean's gown, Fig. 10. The intricate embroidery of the 'nobleman's' gown in Fig. 7 may have inspired the embroidered sleeve pattern for the chairman of the trustees, Fig. 8. The biggest effect of the research came in the gown colour. Not content that little crowns would do enough to brighten ceremonies, the designer selected blue for officers and coloured sleeve cuffs for deans.¹³³

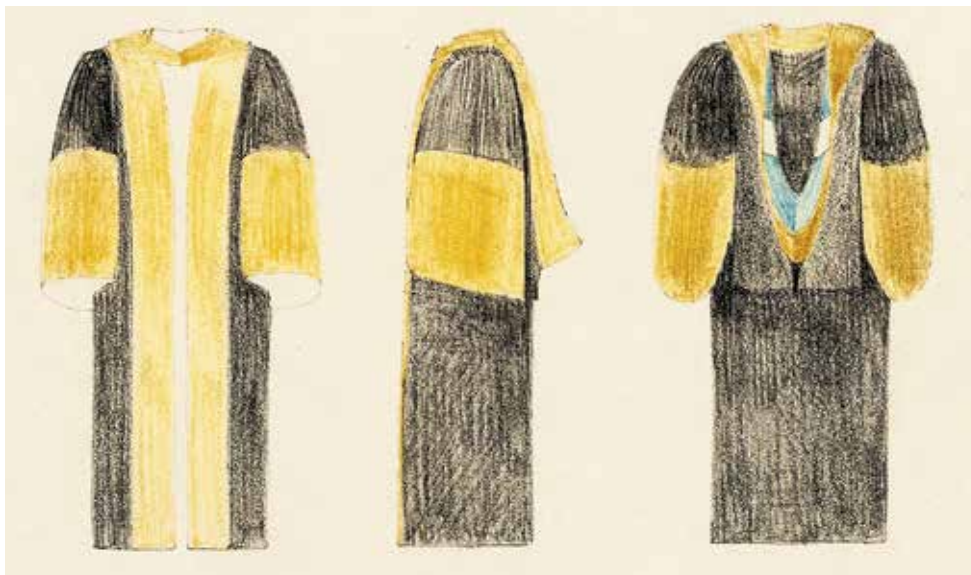
Samples were prepared by Bentley & Simon, of New York. The dean of the School of Architecture, Leopold Arnaud, helped draft the plans. 'I think that [this] costuming would add greatly to the dignity and richness of our public ceremonies.'¹³⁴ The deans especially liked their proposed gown, which had cuffs in the colours of their faculties they led.¹³⁵

For the chairman of the trustees a royal blue gown of 'heavy silk' or rayon with bell sleeves was proposed (see Fig. 8). On the front were two bands of facings 5 inches wide in what had come to be known as Columbia Blue (i.e. light blue). The sleeve trim was quite different: in place of the three horizontal stripes of the doctor's gown, a dozen or more vertical velvet bars ran from the shoulder toward the elbow, each perhaps 10 inches long, also in Columbia Blue. On the lower sleeve, from the wrist toward the elbow, were to be two horizontal bands of velvet, 4 inches apart,

¹³³ Absent from the descriptions, sketches and letters of and relating to the redesign is any mention of a gown for the president, or any acknowledgment of the omission. Perhaps he would have adopted the trustees' gown, for the president of Columbia is also a trustee.

¹³⁴ Letter from Leopold Arnaud to Provost Albert Jacobs, 23 Jan. 1948 (CU, UA, CF, Box 377, Folder 8: Leopold Arnaud).

¹³⁵ Letter from Albert C. Jacobs, provost, to Fackenthal, acting president, 21 July 1947 (CU, UA, CF, Box 383, Folder 6: Jacobs).



University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York

Fig. 10. Dean, 1948.

in Columbia Blue, and in between them an embroidered design of lions' heads (the lion being Columbia's mascot) and crowns in Columbia Blue silk thread.

The chairman also wore a necklace with a medallion of the Columbia crown with 'round decorative disks' for the necklace.¹³⁶ The necklace and pendant were to be of nickel-silver and gold plated.¹³⁷

The mace bearer's gown was to be the same as the chairman's gown, except for the sleeves (see Fig. 9). Instead of vertical bars, a third velvet horizontal band was added, and a simpler pattern was to be embroidered between the two lower horizontal bars, also in Columbia Blue.

The body of the deans' gowns was in black in the same material as the others; the sleeves were to have velvet cuffs in the faculty colour instead of doctor's bars (see Fig. 10). The facings of the gown would also be in the faculty colour. In an alternative sketch, which was evidently not included in the final proposal, the entire sleeve is in the faculty colour, the doctor's bars remain in black, and the deans wear a necklace with crown medallion, similar to the president's, except in silver instead of gold.

The deans' robes in particular, and possibly all the robes, were designed with fasteners to be worn only closed so that the dean would not have to wear his jacket

¹³⁶ Letter from Herpers to Wefferling, 9 Feb. 1948 (ibid.).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

and waistcoat underneath, a move towards less formal dress that has continued in the United States.¹³⁸ In the 1950s, gowns were already being worn closed. Today, unless specifically requested, US academic gowns are made to be worn closed.¹³⁹

Hood marshals would have worn the same gown as the chairman except without the lower sleeve design of lion and crown.

For all, the hood in the sketches appears to be the standard US doctor's hood in the colour of the gown (there is no mention of the hood in the letters or description),¹⁴⁰ and the cap was the mortar-board in royal blue with Columbia Blue trim except for the deans, whose caps were of black velvet with velvet trim in their faculty colour. All caps had a gold button and tassel.

Marshals were to wear an aiguillette of mercerized cotton rope.¹⁴¹ It looped once around the shoulder, leaving a tassel half-way down the front and back. The colour of the aiguillette referred to the marshal's task during the ceremony. Columbia Blue was for the academic procession. Green: the candidates' procession. Red: ushering. Orange: admission and control.

Specifically, faculty marshals were to wear aiguillettes made of two loops of $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch three-strand rope of mercerized cotton, with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch tassels of the same material at the ends, and a rosette on the shoulder. Head marshals and their assistants were somewhat fancier. The tassels were to be made of gold rope, and the rosettes would have been in gold.

These new designs were never adopted. In the waning days of Fackenthal's acting presidency, his idea failed because administrators were concerned that the expense of new gowns would appear profligate at a time of financial hardship for the University, which was increasing its tuition. According to a memo of 18 March 1948, the cost of the new gowns, caps and aiguillettes, at prices submitted by the robemaker Bentley & Simon, was \$3,881.75, or about \$36,359 in 2011 when adjusted for inflation.¹⁴² The matter was concluded several weeks before the arrival of Fackenthal's successor, General Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ 'The features that you were interested in [for the 1948 proposal] were a closed type robe so that the sack coat and vest could be removed and yet maintain the same silhouette as an academic doctor's robe. The robe also contained inner sleeves and concealed fly front.' (Letter from Mr. S. Norman, Bentley & Simon, to Richard Herpers, secretary, 7 July 1950 (CU, UA, CF, Box 28, Folder 4: Ben 1950–51).)

¹³⁹ Interview with Joyce Goode, factory manager, Collegiate Apparel, August 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Knowingly or not, Columbia was departing from the tradition of robes of office in British, Irish, and European universities, in which hoods are usually omitted.

¹⁴¹ Mercerization is a process that adds lustre to fibre and increases its water resistance.

¹⁴² Inflation calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor <<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>>.

¹⁴³ The descriptions come from two sets of documents in two places, both holding most of the same material but each containing information that the other lacks. In chronological order they are: letter from Richard Herpers, assistant to the chairman of the trustees, to

Two years later, when the 1948 proposal was filed away, the secretary of Columbia included with them a set of photographs of another university's redesigned academic dress, suggesting in a cover letter that they may offer inspiration to the next group to reconsider Columbia's gowns.¹⁴⁴ Nothing indicates that Columbia borrowed details from these gowns, but their bold departure from US tradition makes them worth at least a brief look, which may have been all the secretary intended.

Syracuse University had adopted the Code in 1902; the trustees made academic dress at commencement mandatory for degree candidates.¹⁴⁵ In about 1946, the Syracuse chancellor, William Pearson Tolley, requested that special gowns be designed for the university officers. Tolley had been a Methodist minister and held a BA from Syracuse and a PhD from Columbia.

The Syracuse gowns were designed by Professor Montague Charman of the College of Fine Arts and were first worn at commencement on 5 June 1950. 'The designs employ the color of the University, orange, complemented with dark blue, and are in essence related to the gowns worn in the days of early education.'¹⁴⁶ They are striking not only for their colours but also for their complexity. Inner and outer gowns combined to give the costume a fuller, layered look.

The chancellor's gown was the most impressive. The inner garment was a close-fitting white tunic with orange borders at the sleeve cuff, along the edge of the opening in front, and atop the notch collar. Three doctor's bars, in orange, were on the sleeves.

The outer garment was a white robe with broad orange facings that borders the bottom of the gown and covers the yoke on the back. The gown had short orange sleeves that extended just beyond the shoulder. Like the Harvard gown, an emblem was applied to each side of the facings at chest height: one is the seal of the University, the other is the seal of the state of New York; unlike Harvard's gown the emblems are much larger than a crow's foot and appear to be patches. An early sketch, in the Syracuse archives, differs slightly from the finished garment that Tolley wore.¹⁴⁷

Leopold Arnaud, dean of the School of Architecture, with enclosures, 11 Feb. 1948 (CU, UA, CF, Box 377, Folder 8: Arnaud); letter from George W. Allen, department of drafting, to Richard Herpers, secretary, with enclosures, 17 May 1950 (CU, UA, CF, Box 391, Folder 20: Allen).

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Richard Herpers, secretary of the University, to M. Hartley Dodge, clerk of the trustees, 10 Aug. 1950 (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume).

¹⁴⁵ Frank Smalley, ed., *Alumni Record and General Catalogue of Syracuse University, 1899-1904*, 3 vols (Syracuse, N.Y.: Alumni Association of Syracuse University, 1904), Vol. II, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Syracuse University commencement program; 5 June 1950 (Syracuse University Archives, within Record Group 54).

¹⁴⁷ A photograph of Tolley in his gown is available in the archives of Columbia (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume) and in the archives of Syracuse.

Special gowns were provided for other university officers (trustees, vice chancellor, deans, marshals, etc.), and most followed the pattern of the standard doctor's gown.

Within the Ivy League, only Yale had granted graduates a coloured gown by 1950, and to its masters and doctors only. Syracuse had designed gowns only for its officers, as Columbia had proposed. Brown's caps were a distinction reserved for its governing body. It is not clear why only those of the highest ranks were given unique costume, although they were the ones making the decisions.

Harvard was the next Ivy League university to adopt coloured gowns, following Yale's lead of granting them to graduates, but only to those earning the PhD. On 4 April 1955, Harvard approved gowns in crimson, the official university colour.¹⁴⁸ Harvard also added tippets to the gowns of the masters of the undergraduate houses.¹⁴⁹ Worn on the left shoulder, the tippets are two feet long edged with the house colours and they bear the house arms.¹⁵⁰ Tassels were originally black, but changed at some point to include red for marshals and gold for the president.¹⁵¹ The president of Harvard wears a special set of robes most likely derived from Protestant ministers' robes.¹⁵²

Columbia gown proposal: 1958

Three years after Harvard's introduction of crimson gowns, Columbia drew up another proposal.¹⁵³ Unlike the 1948 proposal, this one included all graduates but among the officers the president alone. The other officers, of course, would have had the right to wear the new graduates' gowns *ad eundem* if they were not graduates themselves. This proposal also failed (no reason is noted), but the sketches show, for the first time in an extant illustration, the King's Crown as part of the gown. In addition, the designers changed the hood shape and its design to separate Columbia hoods from the five other institutions that used an identical hood. The draft shows that the writer conducted substantial research of other universities and

¹⁴⁸ Harvard University, 'Regulations Concerning Academic Costume'. June 1951, rev. 1955 (CU, UA, CF, *ibid*). Among those whom Harvard permitted to wear a doctor's gown under the 1951 regulations were Bachelors and Masters of Law and of Theology, and Masters of Public Health (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁹ Letter from O. J. Hoppner, president of Cotrell & Leonard, to Richard Herpers, secretary, 14 June 1955 (CU, UA, CF, Box 57, Folder 5: Cot 1954–55).

¹⁵⁰ John T. Bethell, Richard M. Hunt, and Robert Shenton, *Harvard A to Z* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 301.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Mason Hammond, 'The Academic Costume Worn by the President of Harvard University', unpublished manuscript, c. 1985 (Harvard University Archives, HUB 3100), p. 1.

¹⁵³ *A Consideration of the Code of Academic Costume of Columbia University*, 1958 (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume), *passim*.



**Fig. 11.
MS
proposal,
1958.**



**Fig. 12.
DLitt
proposal,
1958.**

Drawings: University Archives, Columbia University in the City of New York

how their academic dress differed from the Code, and he was aware of the 1948 proposal as well as the Butler and Fackenthal letters looking into crowns.¹⁵⁴ In fact, the university secretary, Richard Herpers, asked Cotrell & Leonard if it was appropriate for Columbia to create its own costume. The robe-maker's president, O. J. Hoppner, answered. 'Although the Academic Costume Code was formulated in the early part of 1900 [*sic*] to create a system which would avoid confusion by adherence to a uniform system, there is nothing, other than tradition, which prohibits a school from departing from the strict interpretation of the code.'¹⁵⁵

The 1958 proposal intended to accomplish three goals: to be unique and recognizable, to be logical and easy to read, and to make sense when worn by a large number of people congregated in one place.

The limits of the Code were at issue, which the proposal's anonymous author makes clear from his first sentence. 'The American Intercollegiate System, apart

¹⁵⁴ The Columbia records would have been in easy reach because they were maintained by the university secretary, who also played a key role in academic costume; the office of university archives was not formed until 1995 (Susan Hamson, University Archivist, 'Timeline: The University Archives and Columbiana Library, 1955–2004' (unpublished manuscript), *passim*).

¹⁵⁵ Letter from O. J. Hoppner, president of Cotrell & Leonard, to Richard Herpers, secretary, 14 June 1955 (CU, UA, CF, Box 57, Folder 5: Cot, 1954–55).



Fig. 13. President proposal, 1958.

from its basic lack of inspiration, has now arrived at the point where duplications have become inevitable.’ Several other institutions had chosen to use a hood lined with light blue and a white chevron identical to Columbia’s (including The Citadel, in South Carolina; the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, N.Y.; the Catholic University of Puerto Rico; the National School of Elocution and Oratory, in Pennsylvania; and Tri-State College in Indiana), and the length of hoods—the doctor’s was four feet long—made them difficult to wear. ‘In addition, making hoods longer for higher degrees presupposes a readjustment of anatomy rarely achieved—Masters and Doctors may increase in spread, but even “elevator shoes” will not compensate for the additional foot added on to the basic length of the Bachelor’s Hood.’

No change was made to the shapes of graduates’ gowns in the proposal. The long, pointed sleeves of the Oxford BA were retained for bachelors, with the gown made of black worsted. On the front of the gown, on each side of the chest 1½ inches below the yoke, a crown was embroidered in the faculty colour, in size 2½ inches tall.

The bachelor’s hood changed to the modern Oxford simple shape [s1], worn with the liripipe pointing outwards,¹⁵⁶ and was also of black worsted and lined with Columbia Blue silk—the white chevron was eliminated—and bound in silk of the faculty colour 1½ inches wide, half on the inside and half on the outside.

Masters’ gowns stayed true to their origin, with arcs cut out of the glove sleeve in the Oxford MA shape (see Fig. 11). The gowns were in black silk, with crowns identical to the bachelors’. The hood, in black silk, was the full shape (adopting the London shape), liripipe pointing inwards, with rounded corners; it was a departure because under the Code only doctors had worn the full shape. Its trimming was identical to the bachelor’s hood, with the addition of binding on the cape, also in the faculty colour.

Changes to the doctor’s gown represented the greatest leap from the Code in the proposed scheme. The plan replaced the three velvet stripes with velvet cuffs. Their size was not specified although from the drawings they appear to be about one foot long. The facings on the front remained. Three versions of the gown were proposed,

¹⁵⁶ I adopt the liripipe descriptions used by Bruce Christianson, ‘The Evolution of the Oxford Simple Shape’, *The Burgon Society Annual*, 2002.

from which one was to be selected for all doctors.

The first version shows a Doctor of Medicine in a scarlet cloth robe with light blue facings, sleeve linings, and cuffs. Along the outer edge of the facings were to be sewn a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-wide ribbon of silk in the faculty colour; the same ribbon appeared at the top of the cuffs. White crowns were embroidered in the same position and of the same size as the other degrees.

The hood was identical in shape and trimming to the masters', but of scarlet cloth. It was the same for each version of the doctor's gown, even though only this gown was scarlet.

The second doctoral proposal is illustrated by a Doctor of Letters, a degree granted *honoris causa*, who wears a black cloth robe with light blue facings, sleeve linings, and cuffs (see Fig. 12). The ribbon was in the faculty colour and the white silk crown is the same as the others.

A Doctor of Laws illustrates the final proposal, in a black silk robe with black facings, but without sleeve lining or faculty ribbon. Instead, the crowns were in faculty colour (following the Harvard crow's-feet scheme), in the same position and size as the others.

The proposal concludes with a sketch for the university president (see Fig. 13). His gown was in the basic master's shape [m10], but the armholes were of the inverted-T shape, as in the Wales masters' and doctors' gown [m4]. The gown was black with light blue facings and ten light blue horizontal stripes, edged in white, on the sleeves from the shoulder to the boot. Two white crowns were embroidered into the facings. He wore a black mortar-board edged in gold with a gold tassel, but no hood.

No proposals were prepared for the deans or other officers. Again, as in 1948, none of these suggestions was accepted. The idea had gained momentum, however, and was soon taken up again.

Columbia's new costume: 1963

In 1963, after revisions in 1948 and 1958 had been prepared but rejected, and thirty years after the idea to decorate the gown with a little embroidered crown was first suggested, the University approved a new gown system that finally ended Columbia's adherence to the Intercollegiate Code.

Inspiration for the new attire came from Harvard's special gown. At Columbia's 1961 commencement, the university president, Grayson Kirk, noticed the crimson doctor's gown worn by a former dean of Columbia College, John Gorham Palfrey, and suggested that Columbia consider improving its costume. He oversaw the redesign with the university provost, Jacques Barzun.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ 'A New Look', *Columbia College Today*, Spring–Summer 1963, p. 9.

Plans proceeded with Cotrell & Leonard, but at some point the University, dissatisfied with Cotrell & Leonard's assistance, decided to end the collaboration and switched to Bentley & Simon. 'The cut, styling, material, colors, and decorations of the cap, gown and hood that were finally approved differ in all important respects from those submitted by Cotrell & Leonard,' Barzun wrote.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, he noted no specific examples of the variations.

Leaving black fabric behind, Columbia selected slate grey. In choosing it, Columbia overlooked its official colour, Columbia Blue, which had been adopted by the trustees on 5 May 1958, as Martin-Senour colour 240-00-5.¹⁵⁹ The material was Chromspun acetate faille. In a touch reminiscent of the Pennsylvania System of 1887, in which students' gowns were bordered in silk cord in their faculty colour, the yokes of the bachelors' and masters' gowns had cording in light blue sewn below the front edges.¹⁶⁰ There was one exception to slate grey: the president alone, according to a newspaper account, wore a gown of light blue.¹⁶¹

The shapes of the new gowns stayed true to those of the Code. For masters, the sleeves had the opening at the wrist (reflecting a change to the master's sleeve in the Intercollegiate Code that took effect in 1960), although the scallops of the master's sleeves were less pronounced than the Oxford MA shape [m1] and more closely resembled the Cambridge MA shape [m2]; they remain so today.¹⁶² The bachelor's and master's gown each have four pleats in the front, two on each side.

Two coloured crowns were embroidered into the velvet facings of the doctor's gown, as at Harvard, and for masters and bachelors, two crowns were embroidered onto black tabs, the top edges of which were sewn into the yoke seam on each side of the gown. The mortar-board was of the same colour and material as the gown, but added black edging to the skull, and a tassel in the faculty colour. Doctors were also given the choice of a black, four-cornered velvet tam, with gold bullion tassel.

The biggest change, aside from the colour, was in the hood. It is this version that

¹⁵⁸ Memo from Jacques Barzun, provost, to Helen King, a university administrator, 18 June 1963 (CU, UA, CF, Box 401, Folder 11: Barzun).

¹⁵⁹ A paint manufacturer in Philadelphia, Martin-Senour no longer has a record of Columbia Blue either by name or number.

In current use, Pantone 290 is used in printing by the office of University Publications and Marketing, although sometimes Pantone 291 is used as a substitute when a slightly darker shade is needed (correspondence with John H. Tucker, public affairs officer, Columbia University, 3 July 2008).

¹⁶⁰ Minutes, 25 April 1887 (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Collection UPA 1.1, Vol. 12, p. 311).

¹⁶¹ David Anderson, '6,313 at Columbia Receive Degrees', *The New York Times*, 5 June 1963, p. 27. The article refers to the president's gown as made of silk. I found no other description of a special gown for Kirk.

¹⁶² That is, they do on gowns for purchase; rental master's gowns shorten the boot so greatly that it no longer resembles any traditional master's sleeve.

is described in Smith and Sheard, with the doctor and bachelor wearing ‘tippets’ attached to a velvet neck band in the faculty colour.¹⁶³ Columbia referred to them as flat capes,¹⁶⁴ although Barzun suggested the rather unwieldy and only somewhat accurate phrase ‘in shape resembling an amice’.¹⁶⁵

Adopting the University’s term, this unusual cape had no cowl. The doctor’s cape was longer than the bachelor’s, and both were narrower at the base than on the shoulders. The bottom of the doctor’s cape ended in a semi-circle (and was filled with weights, presumably to keep it in place on windy days); the bachelor’s was horizontal. Both were light blue with an inverted white chevron.¹⁶⁶

For masters, an even odder item was created. Bentley & Simon called it an ‘ob-long hood’, but in the illustration it resembles a grey scarf that has had its ends sewn together, forming a circle.¹⁶⁷ This creature had no lining, liripipe or cowl, and had neither cape nor chevron. Its only connection to academic dress was the white binding, the use of the faculty colour on the front and shoulders, and, of course, that it was worn with a cap and gown.¹⁶⁸

Such a radical change to the hood is difficult to understand until we remember that seven other universities at the time shared Columbia’s hood lining of white chevron on light blue field. If one includes such colours as Blue, Medium Blue, Pale Blue, Sky Blue, Light Navy Blue, Azure, and Alice Blue, twenty-seven universities in the US and Puerto Rico had hoods similar to Columbia’s.¹⁶⁹ Eleven of them were founded in the twentieth century, after Columbia had chosen its hood.

Smith and Sheard point out that despite the Code’s intention for each institution to have a unique hood lining, the result, in which most hoods have one colour and a single chevron, was greater duplication than individuality.¹⁷⁰

Could this duplication have been an incentive for Columbia to redesign its hood? It certainly is possible, especially after the 1958 proposal referred to the abundance

¹⁶³ Smith, Vol. II, pp. 1597–98, Plates 427–28.

¹⁶⁴ As George Shaw says, referring to the University of Kent hoods of 1966: ‘They cannot correctly be called hoods, since they have no cowl’ (*Academical Dress of British and Irish Universities*, 2nd edn (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), p. 135).

¹⁶⁵ Memo from Jacques Barzun, provost, to campus administrator, 14 April 1967 (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume).

¹⁶⁶ *Official Columbia University Academic Costumes*, a sales pamphlet published by Bentley & Simon Inc., n.d. (but probably from 1964) (CU, UA, CF, Folder 33, Box 2: Commencement).

¹⁶⁷ See also the description and photograph of the ‘hood’ in Kenneth Crawford, ‘The Cutting Edge of Academe: Trends in the Manufacture of Academical Dress’, *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 8 (2008), p. 69 and fig. 48.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Kevin Sheard, *Academic Heraldry in America*, illustrated by Paul Wainio (Marquette, Mich.: Northern Michigan College Press, 1962), *passim*.

¹⁷⁰ Smith, Vol. II, p. 1540.

of identical hoods, and given the decision to adopt a unique gown. In switching to standardized hood shapes and eliminating universities' distinct gown patterns, the Intercollegiate Code had prevented universities from distinguishing their academic costume by anything but the hood lining. When universities started selecting as their own hood one already used by another university, the Code ceased to serve this portion of its purpose.

The new academic dress was designed by Lester Simon Associates of New York and manufactured and distributed by Bentley & Simon. The purchase price for a gown, hood, and cap was \$35.50 for the bachelor, \$49.50 for the master, and \$91.50 for the doctor.¹⁷¹ In 1976 Oak Hall, of Roanoke, Virginia, bought Bentley & Simon. Up to 2008, the doctoral gown appeared on the web site of E. R. Moore, of Chicago, even though Oak Hall bought E. R. Moore in 2005.

While the new costume was still being considered, Barzun noted in a memo to an assistant that President Kirk, after seeing a sample, had specified that the gown should be embroidered with the King's Crown in white, that the hood should not flare too widely at the bottom ('Some flare is desirable but this is too pronounced'), and requested that the front of the hood be shaped so that the knot of the wearer's necktie would still be visible.¹⁷² Indeed, the necktie is visible in the inset drawings on an advertising pamphlet from the time, but the crowns are blue and the hoods get narrower, not wider, at the base.

When the new costume was announced in a printed notice in the spring of 1963, its change was ascribed not to the crimson gown that caught the president's eye but to the students' wishes. 'In consideration of the interest expressed by many graduates, and of a trend accentuating color now being adopted by other universities, Columbia has redesigned its Doctoral academic costume ...'.¹⁷³ The trustees approved the new academic costume only one month before commencement, leaving the robemaker, Bentley & Simon, insufficient time to create gowns for all graduates. Instead, only the university officers, deans, and a few other administrators wore them.¹⁷⁴ A recipient of an honorary Doctor of Letters in 1963, Edward L. Tinker, wore his Sorbonne costume.¹⁷⁵ For some undiscovered reason, the new gowns were

¹⁷¹ Adjusted for inflation, their 2011 cost was \$258, \$360, and \$666 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, <<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>>).

¹⁷² Memo from Jacques Barzun, provost, to campus administrator, 8 May 1962 (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume).

¹⁷³ Campus notice or press release, unsigned, n.d., most likely issued after the Trustees' approval of the new costume on 6 May 1963; commencement that year was held on 4 June (CU, UA, CF, Box 33, Folder 2: Commencement).

¹⁷⁴ Memo from Lawrence H. Chamberlain, vice president, to deans et al., 19 April 1963 (CU, UA, CF, Box 625, Folder 26: Academic Costume).

¹⁷⁵ Bill Sauro, 'A Break with Tradition', a photograph in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 June 1963.

not worn by graduates in 1964; a newspaper photograph of commencement that year clearly shows the graduates in black. Not until 1965 would the slate grey gowns be available for all.¹⁷⁶

Although doctors *honoris causa* today wear the Columbia gown, they were given a choice of wearing their own gowns or donning Columbia's as late as 1969. When Henry Steele Commager was awarded an honorary LLD that year for his legal scholarship, Columbia offered to provide him with its distinctive gown for the ceremony. He replied that he would wear his own costume, that of a Cambridge doctor, but later yielded to Columbia despite his concern about the expense. In a letter to the Columbia secretary, he wrote, 'At the same time I am reluctant to cost the University the rather substantial sum of the cost of the gown, when I have a perfectly adequate and indeed very handsome scarlet gown already—indeed I have two very handsome gowns, one from Cambridge, the other the gown of an Honorary Fellow of Peterhouse.' Despite his protests Commager concluded the letter with his measurements so a Columbia gown could be made for him.¹⁷⁷

University officers wore graduates' gowns or their own. This was also the case for the mace bearer, a role that did not exist until 1933 when an alumnus, John Munro Woolsey, donated a mace that was used at commencement that year.

The mace bearer was given a distinctive costume in 1966, when Samuel M. Devons, a professor of physics, was asked to take the role. An Englishman who held an MA and PhD from Cambridge, Devons initially declined the honour in part because he owned no academic dress; it had been destroyed in the London Blitz. The university official who offered the honour to him promised to find suitable dress.¹⁷⁸

The explanation for the choice of a London higher doctor's gown [d1] is lost but the garments remain. The gown is in red wool with white facings and sleeve linings and matching hood [f3]. Devons served more than a decade as mace bearer, wearing a Tudor bonnet [h2], before the honour was rotated among the faculty each year. Currently the gown and hood, made by Harcourts of Toronto, hang in the university closet that holds the trustees' robes. At commencement it is worn with a pileus cap [h6].

Several universities created unique academic dress in the 1960s. By the end of the decade, all the Ivy League universities had their own and many others had adopted special dress too. Each university became more distinct in this way, taking up where the Code had failed. Coloured gowns, especially those with emblems on

¹⁷⁶ 'Columbia Valedictorian Boomed for Deploring Student Protests', *The New York Times*, 1 June 1965, p. 1, refers to the senior class 'attired in the new slate gray Columbia academic gowns'.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Henry Steele Commager, Amherst College, to Edward B. McMenamin, secretary of Columbia, 19 April 1969 (CU, UA, CF, Box 71, Folder 3: Co).

¹⁷⁸ David Allikas, 'The Columbia Mace: Symbol of Academic Authority', *Columbia Today*, June 1977, pp. 11–13.

them, clearly showed the wearer's university in a way that hoods did not. Because nearly all universities continued to follow gown shapes prescribed by the Code, the degree was obvious from the sleeves; nearly all universities follow the Code's faculty colours, so the field of study remains clear (with the stated exceptions of degree colours that are similar and that new subjects must fall under a colour already in use). Considered as a method to improve upon the Code, rather than an abandonment of it, the switch to special gowns renews one of its purposes: making clear at a glance the university where a graduate studied.

Another reason was put forth at New York University. In 1964 the University changed its academic costumes from the standard black to Mayfair Violet, 'a violet toward the blue end of the spectrum'.¹⁷⁹ In explaining the decision, the university secretary made the point that switching to a coloured costume marked a return to universities choosing unique gowns, a tradition older than the Code, and one that allowed a graduate's university to be identified by his costume, another acknowledgment that the 1895 hood scheme no longer fulfilled its purpose.

The secretary wrote in his memo to graduates: 'In brief, it seems reasonable to enable graduates of New York University to follow the older and better established tradition of universities,¹⁸⁰ in which academic costumes signify not merely the wearer's degree but also his institution, rather than to continue with the standard-black uniformity, which is historically a deviation from the long accepted tradition of universities.'¹⁸¹

Columbia's academic dress today

Since Columbia introduced its 1963 gowns, it has altered the costume somewhat. In the late 1980s, Columbia changed the fabric of its gowns to Coronet, a different synthetic material, and switched colours to Columbia Gray. According to the new robemaker, Collegiate Apparel; the shade has a touch of blue in it. The style of the embroidered crown also changed slightly, most likely a result of switching robemakers.

By 1983, Columbia faculty members began asking for hoods that conformed to the Code because they wanted the same style that faculty with degrees from other universities wore, particularly when sharing a stage with them. As more requests came in for the standard hoods, the university officially changed its graduates' hoods in 2000. Even though the robemaker Collegiate Apparel still offers both the

¹⁷⁹ Color Association of the United States, number 17575.

¹⁸⁰ That is, as old as the early nineteenth century in England. See Nicholas Groves, 'Historical English Academic Robes: A Basis for a National System', *The Burgon Society Annual*, 2004, pp. 59–62. Thanks to Bruce Christianson for pointing this out.

¹⁸¹ Memo from Thomas Clark Pollock, vice president and secretary, to graduates, December 1964 (no day of the month) (New York University Archives, Academic Costume folder).

cape and the traditional hood to Columbia graduates, sales of the cape have all but disappeared.¹⁸² Columbia retains it for its trustees, of whom the university president is a member. (See Fig. 14.)

As its popularity declined at Columbia other American universities have adopted the cape, typically for their trustees, who like it because if the cape is made to a uniform size, it does not indicate degree.¹⁸³ When trustees appear together in academic dress, their differences in education are masked by wearing identical capes.¹⁸⁴

Subtler changes also took place. Columbia's rental gowns switched to gabardine over three years, beginning in 1999, with masters and faculty members. Doctors' rental gowns switched in 2000, and bachelors' gowns, shorn of pointed sleeves, followed in 2001.¹⁸⁵ These were also made by Collegiate Apparel, in Champaign, Illinois, which is a division of Herff Jones.

When the doctors' gowns changed materials in 2000, the rule governing the colour of the sleeve bars changed too. Previously the bars could appear in either the faculty colour or in black; after 2000, they are always black, which matches both the facings and the rule at Yale. At about this time, the sleeve bars on the president's gown grew in number to four. It is the only variation from other trustees to the president's academic dress.

Columbia celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2004, marking the occasion on its gowns by changing them to a lighter shade of blue and by replacing the crown on the bachelors' and masters' gowns with the anniversary logo of a shield, a small crown, and '250'. The tab was enlarged to accommodate the numerals and shield.¹⁸⁶ The following year, when the crown emblems returned to the tabs, the tabs re-



Photograph by the author

Fig. 14. Modern trustee's 'hood', based on the 1963 doctor's hood.

¹⁸² Correspondence with Joyce Goode, factory manager, Collegiate Apparel, 18 Aug. 2008.

¹⁸³ The Stony Brook campus of the State University of New York uses it for all graduates.

¹⁸⁴ Some robemakers still refer to it as the Columbia Hood; Oak Hall sells it as the 'trustees' hood', and Collegiate Apparel refers to it as a flat hood (interviews with Donna Hodges, vice president, Oak Hall, July 2008; and Joyce Goode, factory manager, Collegiate Apparel, July 2008).

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Goode, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ While uncommon, special gowns are prepared by some universities for use during an anniversary year. Less rare are such items as a special signet for the tassel or a stole. Northwestern University used a stole in 2008 (correspondence with Goode, 21 Jan. 2009).



**Columbia gowns c. 2003.
Fig. 15 (above).
Fig. 16 (right).**



**CollegiateApparel/Herff Jones
Fig. 17.**

mained enlarged. On the master's gown, which uses a tab with a point at the bottom (see Fig. 16), the tab had been $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide by $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches deep; it grew to $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches wide by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. The embroidered crown grew from $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches tall and wide to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches both ways. Oak Hall manufactured the anniversary gowns, and is currently the University's robemaker.

In 2006, Columbia became the first US university to award the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), through the School of Nursing. In the late winter of 2008 it changed its Doctor of Nursing Science (DNSc) to a PhD in nursing science. To emphasize the nature of the doctoral degrees, the hoods retain nursing apricot but add a strip of cording on the outside of the edging: for the PhD, cording in the golden yellow of science, and for a DNP, medical green. The nursing PhD graduate therefore wears a hood that differs from the Code, which calls for dark blue for all PhD degrees. The Code disapproves of showing two fields, but doing so is popular with graduates.

Today bachelors and masters who graduate from Columbia do not rent their gowns but purchase what are referred to as 'souvenir' gowns, which are produced at lower cost than standard gowns. The sleeves are joined at the shoulder with shirring instead of fluting; they have only one pleat per side; the yoke is less rigid and lacks the cord and button on the back; and the boots on the souvenir master's sleeves, at 9 inches long, are but vestigial reminders of the size on gowns for purchase, at 23 inches. These souvenir gowns cost \$45 for bachelors and \$52 for masters

and include the mortar-board cap (and tassel, which is in the faculty colour);¹⁸⁷ the mortar-board has an elasticized skull so that one size fits all.¹⁸⁸

Custom-made gowns and caps continue to be made to high standards, which include fluting on the sleeves and four pleats on the front. The doctor's gown from Oak Hall costs \$620; add the hood and tam, and the total is \$868. One can rent a first-quality doctor's gown and hood for about \$100, but the tam must be purchased, for \$100. Collegiate Apparel, which sells the previous version of the Columbia dress (smaller crown tabs and blue-grey material), offers cap (and tassel), hood, and gown for \$328 for bachelors, \$361.30 for masters, and \$907.60 for doctors (See Figs. 15-17). For the academic who wants to stand out from the crowd, Collegiate Apparel will substitute Columbia's non-standard 1963 hood. The price for the complete kits drops to \$295.80, \$338.30, and \$900.10, respectively.¹⁸⁹

A Columbia doctor who purchases her gown from Oak Hall will own one made, as are all Oak Hall doctor's gowns, with eight yards of fabric. That happens to be the limit that Henry VIII's sumptuary law of 1509 allowed a university graduate to use in his long gown.¹⁹⁰ The similarity is most certainly coincidental. Collegiate Apparel, for example, uses about six yards.

Practice

During the twentieth century, academic dress was worn at Columbia at a number of events outside commencement ceremonies that dwindled as the years went on. The annual welcoming of freshmen at the beginning of the fall semester brought out caps and gowns for the faculty and officers; attending the opening ceremony in 1936 were '500 black-capped freshmen ...'.¹⁹¹ (See Fig. 5.) A Committee on Public Ceremonies existed, whose notes refer to marshals and other officials who would wear caps and gowns for events that honoured winners of prizes given by the

¹⁸⁷ 2008 prices.

¹⁸⁸ A forerunner to inexpensive gowns may have been the paper gown. There is no evidence that Columbia ever used such things, but the Scott Paper Company manufactured a throwaway paper gown at some time before the 1970s that resembled, in the words of a company spokesman, 'two Scott towels laminated together with nylon scrim' (M. A. Farber, 'Graduation Styles: A Time of Change', *The New York Times*, 22 June 1972). Scott was purchased by Kimberley-Clark, which kept none of the Scott records. Paper gowns were most likely used only for high school graduations, not universities (correspondence with Goode, 7 Nov. 2008).

¹⁸⁹ All prices from 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Noel Cox, 'Tudor Sumptuary Laws and Academical Dress: An Act against Wearing of Costly Apparel 1509 and An Act for Reformation of Excess in Apparel 1533', *Transactions of the Burgon Society*, 6 (2006), p. 21.

¹⁹¹ 'Dr. Butler Decries "Terror" in Seattle', *The New York Times*, 24 Sept. 1936, p. 10. The 'terror' he decried was a newspaper workers' strike.



Columbia University in the City of New York

Fig. 18.

*Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England
at Columbia University June 10 1939*

(Detail; original in color.) Griffith Baily Coale, 1939. Oil; 10½ feet × 11½ feet

University,¹⁹² as well as for receptions to honour visiting dignitaries.¹⁹³ Academic dress is no longer worn to either kind of ceremony.

One notable example honoured the 1939 visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. As a direct descendant of the king in whose name the original college was chartered, George VI received special attention. The university president, Nicholas M. Butler, was aware that the King had attended Cambridge, so Butler wore the cap, gown, and hood of a Cambridge Doctor of Law, from an honorary degree, while the faculty and trustees who attended the reception in Low Memorial Library wore their academic dress.¹⁹⁴ The royal couple's visit is memorialized in a mural hanging in the university's main library (see Fig. 18).

A newspaper article in 1936 explained academic dress to the general population,

¹⁹² For example, the Maria Moors Cabot Award for outstanding journalism from Latin America.

¹⁹³ Such as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India in 1949 and Governor Thomas Dewey of the state of New York.

¹⁹⁴ C. E. Lovejoy, 'King George and Queen Elizabeth Thrill Columbia by Campus Visit', *Columbia Alumni News*, 30, 16 June 1939, p. 4; a copy is in CU, UA, CF, Box 110, Folder 11: Biography.

referring specifically to Columbia. It reported that ninety-five percent of students graduating from Columbia would rent their caps and gowns (the others presumably either purchased them or did not participate in commencement), and that the Columbia bookstore expected to rent between 2,500 and 3,000 costumes in 1936. 'Rentals used to run as high as \$5,' according to the article, but the price for the bachelor's cap and gown was declining: \$2 in 1935 and \$1.75 in 1936.¹⁹⁵ For masters that year the rental fee was \$2.25, and for doctors, \$4.50 to \$6.¹⁹⁶ No reason is given for the variation in prices for the doctor. The article does mention that the businesses related to graduations, including robe makers, bookstores that rent costumes, and diploma engrossers turned over about \$20 million annually at the time, which adjusted for inflation would be \$324.7 million in 2011.¹⁹⁷

Graduates were probably hooded some time in the early twentieth century because the 1948 academic dress proposal includes a robe specifically for hood marshals. Today, however, only six of Columbia's sixteen schools include hoods in their graduation ceremonies and no special costume is designated for hood marshals.

Since the Code was enacted, Columbians have worn their gowns to commencement reliably, even after the violent demonstrations in May 1968 when a group of students occupied the administration building for several days to protest against, among other things, university research on behalf of the Department of Defense, which was seen as benefiting the war in Viet Nam.

A history professor, Orest Allen Ranum, who taught at Columbia in the 1960s, wrote an essay after his office was broken into and many of his research papers were burnt by students. 'The morning after the first occupation of the university building, I put on my gown—I usually lecture in a gown—and decided to go over there' to the president's office, where the students had barricaded themselves.¹⁹⁸ Gowns were rarely worn on a daily basis in the 1960s.

The campus disturbances that spring, which ended when New York Police Department officers were called to campus to rout the students, left the student body divided. Although only a small portion of students was involved in the protests, their forcible removal gained them many sympathizers.

The students' feelings were present at commencement, which had been moved

¹⁹⁵ Adjusted for inflation, in 2011 dollars they once cost \$82 and declined to \$33 and then \$28 in 1936 (Inflation calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>>).

¹⁹⁶ Adjusted for inflation, in 2010 dollars the prices would be \$37 for masters, and between \$73 and \$97 for doctors (ibid.).

¹⁹⁷ Inflation figure: ibid. Article: B. L. Duffus, 'A Million Graduates: Commencement, a Major June Industry, Also is One of Our Oldest Customs', *The New York Times*, 7 June 1936.

¹⁹⁸ Orest Allan Ranum, 'Orest Allan Ranum', in *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*, eds. Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

from its usual outdoors spot on the main campus in front of Low Memorial Library to the nearby sanctuary of the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine. As the ceremony began, a student gave a signal and about 300 graduates (out of 1,600 in attendance) and fifteen faculty members left the ceremony, quietly for the most part, to return to campus to hold a 'counter-commencement'.¹⁹⁹ Even at the rump event, many students wore their gowns.²⁰⁰

The following year, however, at the convocation for graduating students in Teachers College, a graduate school at Columbia, the president of the college's Student Senate addressed the assembled crowd on the topic of hierarchy in academia. As a protest against it, he invited the graduates to doff their gowns.²⁰¹ Of the 2,000 students before him, approximately six did so.²⁰²

In the twenty-first century, academic dress is left in the closet for all formal ceremonies except those around graduation and a university president's inauguration. Columbia students today wear gowns only during the week of commencement. As at other older American universities, Columbia celebrates commencement over several days, beginning with a church service the Sunday before graduation (which is on Wednesday at Columbia), held on campus in St Paul's Chapel. Caps and gowns are mandatory for this, the baccalaureate service, but hoods are not permitted because the candidates have not yet been admitted to their degrees.

Commencement week includes many informal activities, such as parties and reunions. Class Day is another such event, typically held the Monday before graduation, at which the senior class assembles for the announcement of awards to students for academic achievement and a speech from a prominent alumnus or alumna. Academic dress is worn to the ceremony.

The graduate schools hold special events for their graduates, also with speeches and awards, but academic dress is rarely required.

On Wednesday morning of commencement week, graduating students assemble on the quadrangle to be admitted to their degrees. At this ceremony, attended by several thousand students, each dean introduces his or her faculty's degree candidates *en masse* to the president, who confers the degrees to the entire class at once. Caps and gowns are required to participate, but hoods, as before, are not permitted.

¹⁹⁹ Sylvan Fox, '300 at Columbia Leave Ceremony; Walk Out Quietly in Protest as Commencement is Held at St. John Cathedral', *The New York Times*, 5 June 1968, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ As evident in colour photographs in the exhibit '1968: Columbia in Crisis', Jocelyn Wilk, curator, 17 March–1 August 2008, CU, UA. On-line at <<https://ldpd.lamp.columbia.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/1968>> (accessed 1 September 2011).

²⁰¹ Craig Mosher, 'The Human Price of Earning a Degree', text of a speech delivered to a convocation at Teachers College, 3 June 1969 (CU, Teachers College, Gottesman Library, RG 29, Box 1: Student Senate 1968/69–1972/73; Folder: Student Senate 1968/69).

²⁰² Murray Schumach, 'Commencements: Disruption Assailed at Columbia', *The New York Times*, 4 June 1969.

Hoods finally come out at the diploma ceremonies of some schools, including the College of Dental Medicine, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Teachers College, and the Law School. This is the event when each graduate's name is called and he or she walks across a dais to shake hands with the dean and to receive his or her diploma. At the ceremonies where hoods are worn cap and gown, naturally, are too.

The Mailman School of Public Health currently requires only cap and gown of its candidates, but the dean is considering a proposal to add hoods to its doctors' diploma ceremony. The school graduates Masters of Public Health (MPH), Masters of Science, as well as Doctors of Public Health (DrPH) and Doctors of Philosophy (which are granted in conjunction with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences). The proposal calls for hooding individual recipients of the doctorate and is motivated by a peer institution's practice and the desire for a change in the ceremony.²⁰³

Columbia has thirteen schools in addition to those just mentioned; of them, eleven require cap and gown for their diploma ceremonies. The exceptions are two graduate schools, the School of the Arts and the Graduate School of Journalism, where ordinary clothes are appropriate.

Conclusion

How often will gowns be worn in the future? Rarely, if the trend toward informality continues.

At Columbia, most students wear them only twice, during the week of their commencement; candidates for the Bachelor of Arts in Columbia College wear them four times that week. When the current university president, Lee C. Bollinger, was inaugurated in 2002, faculty and administration from Columbia and visiting universities wore academic dress. President Bollinger, who had left the presidency of the University of Michigan to come to Columbia, holds a JD and an LLD *honoris causa* from Columbia, and for his inauguration chose to wear an older, black gown with a Columbia connection. 'The gown is a gift from a dear friend at the University of Michigan' who had also graduated from the Columbia Law School. 'It's a beautiful gown—he had it made for himself,' Bollinger said, and added that he likes it more than those now available.²⁰⁴ Since becoming president he wears the special Columbia president's gown and trustee's cape.

No other Columbia ceremony calls for caps and gowns. Even the commencement procession has been abbreviated. It once began at the front door of Butler Library and continued to the dais in front of Low Memorial Library, a distance of about 100 yards, across which twin files of university officers and faculty proceeded

²⁰³ Interview with Jim Glover, director of student affairs, Mailman School of Public Health, 25 July 2008.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Lee C. Bollinger, president of Columbia, 21 Oct. 2008.

through the assembled audience of family and friends, the better to display colourful gowns and hoods. Recently, however, the ceremony has been shown on two jumbo television screens, one erected on each side of the dais, to make viewing easier for the audience. With the addition of technology, the procession now begins at the door of Low and marches down all of 26 stair-steps to the speaker's platform.

Of the eight university presidents in the twentieth century, only four wore academic dress for their portraits:

Seth Low 1890–1901

An unusual gown: black, deep red²⁰⁵ facings but no sleeve bars, white sleeve linings; no hood.

Nicholas M. Butler 1902–45

Oxford doctor's full dress robe of a DLitt.

Dwight D. Eisenhower 1948–53

Code's doctor's gown, worn open, with deep red (possibly rose, which at the time indicated philanthropy) facings, sleeve bars and hood edging.

Michael J. Sovern 1980–93

The first to appear in Columbia's twentieth-century doctor's gown: light blue, worn closed, with black facings and three sleeve bars, and hood.

Eisenhower's 1953 portrait was the last in a consecutive series of presidential paintings²⁰⁶ beginning with Barnard (who was president from 1864 to 1889) in which the sitter wore his gown. The president who oversaw the change in academic dress, Grayson Kirk (1953–68), chose to pose in a suit, and his immediate successors, Andrew W. Cordier (1969–70) and William J. McGill (1970–80), likewise posed without cap and gown.

Not until Michael J. Sovern (1980–93) retired did academic dress return to a portrait, but he was not able to renew the tradition. Sovern's successor, George Rupp, who retired in 2002, wore a dark blue suit with a red necktie. Columbia's artistic record leaves only two presidents in Columbia gowns although five could have worn them. Rupp was the first president who could have been painted in the special president's gown, which has a fourth sleeve stripe. Perhaps President Bollinger will select it in spite of his preference for the older gown he wore to his inauguration.

The University itself seems unaware of its place in the history of academic dress. The nine-sentence explanation of the history of cap and gown that accompanies on-line commencement information makes no mention of Columbia's eighteenth-century adoption of the gown. And by writing that 'in the late twentieth century, universities in America began to adopt more colorful robes', Columbia overlooks its

²⁰⁵ Identifying the precise colour is nearly impossible without a spectrometer. Even with such a device, the determination would not relate to the Code, which had no red among its approved colours in 1901.

²⁰⁶ From 1945 to 1948 Frank Fackenthal served as the acting president; he left no presidential portrait.

own 1887 scarlet gown and other universities' nineteenth-century coloured gowns, as well as Brown's coloured caps in 1912, and Yale's blue gowns in 1938.²⁰⁷

As if to make official the shrinking significance of academic dress, Columbia's own scheme was inadvertently omitted from the latest publications of university statutes. The university secretary, who maintains Columbia's records, published an updated edition of the statutes in the summer of 2008, the first time in forty-nine years that the statutes, which the trustees occasionally amend, had been organized into one volume.²⁰⁸ The section on academic dress overlooked the 1967 amendment authorizing Columbia's departure from the Code.²⁰⁹ In its place was an older version of the statute that called for black gowns.

Left out is their most distinguishing feature, the one that two university presidents were so eager to put in place. In fact, crowns are prohibited by a strict reading of the statute, which uses the language of the Code: 'For the bachelor's and master's degrees, the gowns are to be untrimmed.' For doctors, the only trimming permitted is the facings and sleeves bars, and both are permitted to be in the faculty colour (or black; in practice, only black is worn on the coloured gown). Trustees are to wear Columbia hoods that match their own degrees, a rule that ignores the practice of trustees wearing capes.

It would be tempting to think that someone sat down to consider and approve this change, but an explanation that fits with the text is that the trustees' 1967 statute has not been overturned. Telltale signs of the statute's age are its references to four-foot-long master's hoods (part of the Code until 1932), and white as a faculty colour for journalism (which it was until 1960). Its call for silk masters' and doctors' gowns, if it were intentional, would mark an about-face for a university that once denied a change to its academic dress on the ground of high cost.

When the record of statutes was revised again and published in June 2010, academic dress fared only slightly better. The colour of the gown and cap are now to be slate blue (as they were in 1963), even though the colour used today is a fairly light blue.²¹⁰ The rest of the text remains unchanged from the 2008 version.

Of all the regulations governing the University, the one concerning academic

²⁰⁷ 'University Commencement: Academic Regalia', Commencement 2011 <<http://www.columbia.edu/content/university-commencement-2.html>> (accessed 6 August 2011).

²⁰⁸ Office of the Secretary, *Charters and Statutes, Columbia University in the City of New York: Edition of April 6, 1959, With Amendments to July 1, 2008*, Chapter 40, 'Academic Costume', sections 400 and 401, pp. 119–21.

²⁰⁹ Although approved in 1963, it was not added to the statutes until four years later (CU, UA, Minutes of the Trustees of Columbia University, Vol. LXXXVIII, 1 May 1967, pp. 420–22). Subsequent changes in colour and hoods were made without amending the statutes.

²¹⁰ Office of the Secretary, *Charters and Statutes, Columbia University in the City of New York: Edition of April 6, 1959, With Amendments to June 2010*, Chapter 40, 'Academic Costume', sections 400 and 401, pp. 119–121 <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/secretary/>> [then click on 'University Charters and Statutes'] (accessed 6 Aug. 2011).

dress is hardly of great significance. The outdated inclusion, however, could be seen as another example of the dwindling significance of academic dress at one of the first campuses to embrace it in North America.

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