From Gym Crow to P4C: Recontextualizing P4C's Reasonableness within the Racial Politics of the 1960s

Jonathan Wurtz

Abstract: As the story is often told, P4C was established after Matthew Lipman, then a professor of education at Columbia University, observed a deficiency in reasoning skills among his students and colleagues during the student protest of April 1968. Lipman pondered whether there might be a way to enhance the critical thinking skills of individuals through an educational reform; and thus, P4C was born. Consequently, Lipman and P4C are frequently presented as beacons of hope for a more sustainable democratic future in the face of systemic discrimination, pervasive private interests and corruption, and the erosion of justice. I contend that this narrative relies on the delegitimization of a successful grassroots anti-racist campaign against the aggressive gentrification of Black and Puerto Rican families that Columbia had undertaken. Building on Darren Chetty's critique of reasonableness in P4C, I present the conventional narrative of P4C's origin as an instance of reasonableness' gatekeeping function in philosophy for children. I specifically argue that the narrative of Columbia 1968 serves as an explicit example of how reasonableness can silence successful pro-Black educational reforms by labeling the actions of students as "unreasonable". In other words, this paper highlights a significant oversight in P4C practitioners' awareness of their own discipline, particularly in relation to the racial politics of the 1960s.

In 2018, Darren Chetty published a defining critique of traditional Philosophy for Children (P4C). According to them, the concept of reasonableness—a central notion in Lipman's P4C— "might be conceived as both structured by 'white ignorance' produced by 'the racial contract' and as a tool for maintaining 'white ignorance' by rendering actions intended to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy as 'unreasonable,' while posing as a conceptual and philosophical norm that sits 'outside of ideology'" (Chetty, 2018, p. 40). In this way, the standard of reasonableness deployed in many P4C sessions might function as a gatekeeping epistemic norm pre-selecting which identities and utterances can be recognized as reasonable and worthy of consideration in the community of philosophical inquiry. The main issue at hand for Chetty is the way that culture and history specifically influence what can show up as reasonable within the community of inquiry. In majority white communities of inquiry, reasonability runs the risk of reaffirming white ignorance and supremacy in P4C-led discussions on race and racism and thus actively dismissing anti-racist acts as unreasonable and endorsing white supremacist acts as reasonable. While Chetty substantiates this argument with personal experience and structural claims about the concept of reasonability in P4C, it lacks a historically situated empirical example that can speak to the structural issues they are highlighting. This paper provides such an example through a discursive analysis of P4C's origin story.

According to the story, P4C's co-founder, Matthew Lipman, was inspired to bring philosophy to young children after his experience of the 1968 student protest at Columbia University while he was

chair of the Education Department. The following two quotes are some of the most comprehensive accounts of how the protests led to Lipman's creation of P4C.

> During the 1960s, I began to be involved in a series of conversations about children, art and education with Joseph D. Isaacson of the Child Study Association. These talks were topped off by the university riots of 1968. Neither the Columbia University administration, nor the faculty, nor the students came off particularly well: They seemed bewildered and unreasonable. I wonder what they should have or have experienced earlier in their lives, to be more reasonable now. They had all passed through the school system. Could that be the locus of the problem? If so, could the Logic and Critical Thinking course I offered to adult evening students be revised so as to make children think more reasonably, more reflectively, more critically? (Lipman 2009, p. 24-25)

> There was so much rigidity among both students and the university administration, so little communication, so little recourse to reason. I was beginning to have serious doubts about the value of teaching philosophy. It didn't seem to have any impact on what people did. I began to think that the problem I was seeing in the university couldn't be solved there, that thinking was something that had to be taught much earlier, so that by the time a student graduated from high school, skillful, independent thinking would have become a habit. (Lipman, in Chance, 1986, p. 41)

This narrative of P4C as a response to the widespread lack of reasonableness by university students, faculty, and administration, I contend, exemplifies white ignorance within the literature by silencing the deeper racial context that underlies this event. As such, in an attempt to shed new light on P4C's own origin and racial commitments, this paper contextualizes this origin story within the too often overlooked racially loaded background of Columbia 1968. I conclude that framing the students' actions (specifically those of the Society for Afro-American Students) as a threat to education and democracy is an instance of P4C affirming its own reasonability by "rendering actions intended to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy as 'unreasonable'" (Chetty, 2018, p. 40).

While many P4C practitioners may be aware of the Columbia protest of 1968 and its influence on Lipman, the literature often demonstrates a certain color-blindness, particularly in acknowledging its own origin story. It may not be widely known that P4C originated within the racial tensions of the 1960s civil rights era, with roots tracing back to the Columbia student protest fueled by the University's aggressive attempts to gentrify Harlem's Black and Puerto Rican residents out of their home. The oversight of this historical context within P4C literature emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of its genesis—one that can specifically recognize and legitimize the racial struggle underpinning it. Instead of viewing the Black students at Columbia University as bewildered and unreasonable individuals threatening higher education, the deeper context shows us that they organized a successful resistance against a powerful White institution's attempt to take over one of the most culturally significant neighborhoods of Black America and opened the way for multiple pro-Black reforms at the university. In light of this silenced history, I argue that the traditional portrayal of P4C as a beacon of hope amid politically unstable times finds roots in the portrayal of the Black Power movement as "unreasonable."

In the following sections, I begin by providing a brief overview of Chetty's criticism of reasonableness in P4C. In section two, I then present a historically isolated and generalized summary of the events that took place at Columbia University between April 23, 1968, and April 30, 1968. This summary approaches the events from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with the deeper racial context, akin to what Lipman or a contemporary P4C theoretician/practitioner might know. The aim is to illustrate how an outsider to the narrative could succumb to the same evaluation Lipman expressed above. The third section follows this with a discussion of the relation between this narrative of the Columbia 1968 riots and P4C's overall social and pedagogical project. I specifically present the student protest as the background of unreasonableness that elevates P4C as a therapeutic pedagogical reform to the social and political tensions of the 60s. In the fourth section, I dive into the deeper racial context of Columbia 1968 and P4C's origins by means of three subsections, each addressing a fundamental element missing from the story summarized in section two: 1) Harlem's history and its value to Black America, 2) Columbia's aggressive gentrification of Harlem and Morningside Heights, and 3) Black power philosophy and activism. Considering the absence of such crucial elements from the narrative, I conclude that we can reinterpret P4C's origin story as an embodiment of Chetty's criticism. In other words, it is a narrative that stands on a white norm of reasonability which, in turn, delegitimizes successful pro-Black actions as unreasonable.

1. Chetty's Criticism of Reasonableness as a P4C Gatekeeper

Chetty's criticism of reasonableness in P4C begins by exploring how "reasonableness itself is constituted and understood" as well as how this constitution "can limit the possibilities for discussing and addressing race and racism within educational practices that see philosophical thinking as vital to education, and particularly to education for democracy" (Ibid., p. 41). In essence, Chetty aims to lay out how particular conceptions of reasonableness impede P4C's capacity to foster meaningful discussions on race and racism, especially within educational frameworks that are intertwined with democratic political norms. Reasonableness then runs the risk of operating as a racially loaded gatekeeping standard for sense-making in P4C dialogues. As they explain,

> whilst racism is often assumed to be the preserve of unreasonable individuals, an understanding of the world informed by Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* permits us to see that reasonableness might be conceived as both structured by 'white ignorance' produced by 'the racial contract' and as a tool for maintaining 'white ignorance' by rendering actions intended to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy as 'unreasonable', whilst posing as a conceptual and philosophical norm that sits 'outside of ideology.' (Ibid., p. 39-40)

In other words, while racism is commonly seen as irrational, Chetty, drawing on the perspectives of Charles Mills and Kristie Dotson, contends that racism can often be shaped within and through the white epistemic norms of reasonability. The assumed and idealized portrayal of racism as irrational is frequently weaponized by White supremacist power structures to discredit people of color as unreasonable. Consequently, organizing P4C sessions around the concept of reasonableness may marginalize children of color by categorizing their words and viewpoints as unreasonable (i.e., outside the framework of white epistemic norms of dialogue). Simultaneously, this reinforces the dominance and perceived epistemic superiority of white children by characterizing their approach to

philosophical inquiry as reasonable (i.e., within the established white epistemic norms of dialogue and inquiry).

To understand how the notion of reasonableness can serve as a tool for white ignorance and supremacy, it is essential to first understand the nature of reasonability in P4C for Lipman

> To be reasonable indicates that one has the capacity to employ rational procedures in a judicious manner, in the sense that, say, a hospital physician dealing with a highly contagious patient must make reasonable judgments as to the employment of standard medical procedures. But to be reasonable can refer not just to how one acts, but to how one is acted upon: It signifies one's capacity to listen to or be open to reason. Both senses of the term are fundamental for the community of Inquirers. (Lipman, 2001, p. 97)

To be reasonable does not only involve rationality but implies the amalgamation of reason with proper judgment. Gasparatou notes that this definition is intentionally broad, stating that "being able to think well, or even to think at all is a very broad ability" (Gasparatou, 2017, p. 105). Nevertheless, as Chetty contends, a "concept that is at once so important and so nebulous is deserving of closer attention" (Chetty, 2018, p. 42). What specifically needs to be examined is the seemingly historical, cultural, and creative essence of reasonableness since it is there that we'll uncover any implicit racially charged values.

Chetty stresses that both Lipman and Sharp underscored the significance of culture and history in reasonability. However, Lipman also emphasizes that it is impossible to "specify such literacy in terms of a particular set of contents" (Lipman, 1991, p. 65, cited in Chetty, 2018, p. 4). The question then arises: if they cannot be predetermined before entering the community of philosophical inquiry, where are the cultural and historical elements of P4C expected to originate?

> Whilst acknowledging the literature that discusses 'reasonableness' as multi-layered, my twenty-five years of involvement with Philosophy for Children as a trainee, practitioner and trainer has led me to believe that the two aspects of reasonableness most prevalent in P4C practice and scholarship in the UK and mostly likely beyond are as follows: 1) reasonableness is constituted and understood through dialogic inquiry in a community of inquiry that is 2) governed by imposed or negotiated ground rules which are intended to be reasonable and foster reasonableness. (Chetty, 2018, p. 5)

In essence, reasonability is a socially constructed concept that arises through the practice of philosophical dialogue amongst equal participants in the community of philosophical inquiry. This is why determining the historical and cultural content of reasonability in advance is challenging—we cannot do so without knowing and engaging with the actual participants. However, this is precisely the core of the problem for Chetty. As they point out, a "racially representative classroom is not the norm in the UK (where I live and teach), in the USA (where P4C originated), or in South Africa (where I retain family connections and where a growing amount of P4C work is happening)" (Ibid., p. 6). This lack of representation is not limited to P4C-related events but also extends to professional philosophy in the US and thus to P4C practitioners and trainers. According to a recent study, although Asian, Hispanic, and multiracial students are proportionately represented at the

undergraduate level, all racial identities are underrepresented at the graduate studies level. Non-Hispanic Black graduate students, in particular, are "substantially underrepresented," constituting only 2.5% of philosophy Ph.D. recipients, despite the Black population making up more than 13% of the US (Schwitzgebel et al., 2021). From this we can deduce that "if representativeness is important for reasonable deliberation, educators faced with unrepresentative classrooms and educational spaces presumably need to take active steps to bring in perspectives that are insufficiently represented, particularly when their under-representation may be related to historical oppression and marginalization." (Chetty, 2018, p. 44). Thus, if representation is so important to the cultivation of reasonability, then most P4C trainers, practitioners, and participants will need to actively work to fill in the historical and cultural gaps present in their session.

Nevertheless, this is precisely the juncture where Chetty highlights how prevalent and everyday discourses of reasonability are already imbued with white ignorance. This, alongside the underrepresentation of people of color in P4C, impedes practitioners' ability (e.g., teachers, parents, graduate students, or professional philosophers) to establish historically informed and culturally sensitive CPIs that avoid reinforcing white dominance—particularly in conversations surrounding racially charged topics. As Chetty emphasizes, "a standard of reasonableness might serve to limit the extent to which a person from, say, a racially minoritized perspective can argue, challenge, and disagree with what is taken to be 'reasonable' with regard to racism" (Ibid., p. 9). To exemplify this, we can briefly turn to another of Chetty's works "The Elephant in the Room" which provides a criticism of the P4C-approved picture book *Tusk Tusk*—a story about a black and a white elephant who hate each other for no apparent reason. They argue that "the absence of culture, geography, power imbalances, indigenous and non-indigenous, religion, language diversity, history and racism leads to allegories of racism that have simplified [it] to the point of falsifying" (Ibid., 2014, p. 24) As a result, *Tusk Tusk* ends up presenting racism as an unreasonable error with no history or social reality. By decontextualizing racism from its historical and social realities, the story can promote a narrative that is "consistent with de facto Whiteness - that it is OK to look different and that we should tolerate those who are" all the while failing to "problematize Whiteness against the norm to which all else is measured, compared, and othered" (Ibid., p. 22). I contend that this very same phenomenon can be identified in P4C's origin story as a reasonable response to the widespread unreasonableness exemplified by the 1968 Columbia University student protest.

2. Columbia 1968: "bewildered and unreasonable"

To understand how P4C's heroic origin story is steeped in white ignorance, we must first lay out the story and characters of Columbia's April 1968 student protest. This is done for two reasons. First to bolster a barren narrative around P4C's relationship to the events of Columbia 1968. Second, this generalized narrative of the Columbia student protest (i.e., stripped of most of its racial history and tension) will later serve as a backdrop against which we can highlight the white ignorance present within P4C's own origin story. As the story is often told, there are two major players fighting for two interrelated but different goals. On the one hand, we have the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) who, in previous years, had exposed the university's complicity in the Vietnam War through its relationship with the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) — an independent weapons testing organization which students viewed "as a symbol of aiding the Vietnam War effort and as opposing

the spirit and purpose of the university as an institution for the continuation of humane ideals" (Alston, 2015). In response to some relatively minor anti-military protests on campus, then university president Grayson Kirk banned indoor picketing and demonstrations in 1967. In March of 1968, the SDS defied this policy and staged a student protest inside the campus library demanding that the University stop its relationship with IDA. In retaliation, President Kirk placed six of the SDS' leaders under academic probation—they would become known as the IDA six.

On the other hand, there was the Society for Afro-American Students (SAS) protesting the construction of a new university gymnasium in Morningside Park. Columbia University resides one block away from Harlem in New York City (a historically Black neighborhood) with Morningside Park acting as a sort of buffer zone between the two entities. The university planned to erect a new gymnasium to replace its badly outdated athletic facility. The decision was made to build the new gym in Morningside Park to benefit both Columbia students and the Harlem community. However, the SAS asserted that "Columbia effectively stole the land from the predominantly black community that had traditionally used Morningside Park" (Wilk and Golia, 2010). Columbia's gym design drew particular criticism from the SAS, as it required students and the Harlem community to enter the building through separate entrances. While primarily white students could access the entire facility from the front entrance, Harlem residents, primarily Black and Puerto Rican, were relegated to entering through the basement and permitted to use only a small portion of the gym. This unequal and segregated access to the gym, situated in what many Harlem residents viewed as their park, invoked memories of the recently overturned separate but equal doctrine. Consequently, Columbia's project earned the moniker "Gym Crow."

While both SAS and SDS operated independently, they came together on the issue of the gymnasium. On April 22nd, 1968, SAS president Cicero Wilson and SDS president Mark Rudd co-endorsed a planned collaborative protest at the Sundial the next day. On April 23rd, over 300 students came together to protest the building of the gym. Students, led by Rudd, originally attempted to occupy the library to provide President Kirk with a list of demands. However, to everyone's shock, the library had been locked down by the president right before the protest. The students then deviated to the gym construction site where they breached the fence perimeter and were met by police. In fear of escalating the conflict with officers, Rudd convinced students to return to campus and seize Hamilton Hall.

After seizing the building, student protestors had, according to Columbia University Libraries, "restrained acting Dean Henry Coleman from leaving his office" and released a list of demands to the university (Ibid.). While both SAS and SDS originally worked together to occupy Hamilton Hall, on April 24th, the 86 SAS members eventually decided to evict the rest of the white students—primarily due to their lack of discipline and actionable planning—and renamed the building "Malcolm X Liberation College." The SDS then led multiple student occupations in Low Library (where President Kirk's office was located), Avery Hall, Fayerweather Hall, and Mathematics Hall.

Following the occupation, university faculty began meeting and established the Ad Hoc Faculty Group (AHFG) on April 25th. The faculty group "supported three resolutions: the immediate suspension of gym construction; the establishment of a tripartite disciplinary mechanism; and a

commitment by participating faculty to interpose themselves between police and students should police be called to clear the campus" (Ibid.). On April 28th, the AHFG presented "The Bitter Pill Resolution," which proposed "that students vacate the building in exchange for Columbia's withdrawal from IDA, the cancellation of gym construction, creating tripartite disciplinary procedures, collective and uniform disciplinary action that precluded serious consequences for protest leaders" (Alston, 2015). Neither students nor administrators accepted these terms.

On April 30th, at 2 a.m., more than 1000 police officers assembled at Columbia University to begin recapturing the seized buildings. They started with the SAS-occupied Hamilton building, with all 86 members surrendering peacefully. Police then proceeded to retake Low Library, making 93 arrests in the process. They continued to Fayerweather Hall and Mathematics Hall, where they encountered some resistance. By 4 a.m., the police had cleared every occupied building and made 712 arrests.

3. Setting the Tone: The Epistemic Function of Columbia 1968

If we compare the events described above against the backdrop of traditional P4C values (e.g., freedom, equality, solidarity, diversity, and reasonable communication) we can see how Columbia 1968 emboldens this narrative of P4C as medicine meant to mitigate or even cure the cognitive and behavioral ills that plague our political and social deliberative spaces. As we can recall from Lipman's quotes above, there was an uncharacteristic lack of dialogue, negotiation, and reciprocity; all further evidenced by the use of police force on April 30th. Additionally, the administration often used its power over the students to silence them (as with the protest ban and the disciplinary actions taken against IDA six). The students both segregated themselves according to race and were unwilling to negotiate their terms with either faculty or the administration. If we look at Columbia 1968 as an isolated event, it appears as if none of the parties sought to resolve the situation at hand—no one collaborated, no one engaged in dialogical reflection with each other—and ultimately, the situation had to be terminated using state force.

We can draw further insights into the epistemic function of Columbia 1968 from the P4C literature. While the events of the Columbia protest remain largely underdiscussed in the literature, when it is mentioned, it is almost always as the "unreasonable" event that urged Lipman to begin P4C. For instance, David Kennedy (2011) characterizes Columbia 1968 as the "acrimonious events" that "jolted" Lipman into initiating P4C (Kennedy, 2011, p. 65). Darcy Hall (2003) suggests that Lipman was particularly disturbed by the breakdown of "reasoned communication between faculty and students" during these events (Hall, 2003, p. 138). The *History, Theory, and Practice of Philosophy for Children* anthology explains that Lipman developed P4C after witnessing "underdeveloped reasoning skills in his students" (Naji and Hashim, 2017, p. xviii). Walter Kohan (2010) tells us that,

> Despite being sympathetic to some of the students' grievances – such as giving students more participation in governing the universities – he believed that these movements would lead not to the transformation of the universities but to their destruction (Kohan, 2010, p. 170).

In other words, rather than reforming the spaces of knowledge and learning, such student protests would counter-productively destroy or degenerate them. Columbia 1968 is then presented as the epistemic locus of P4C's *raison d'être*; it functions as its origin story, that is, as the tangible expression of the broader pedagogical illness that motivated Lipman into action.

Origin stories are epistemically important because they provide an easy and accessible way to identify something's nature and values. Oedipus Rex, for example, famously homologizes self-consciousness with learning one's origin. Origin stories identify by offering a sense of shared commonality along the vast and various potential expressions of being across time. It gives everyone an equal epistemic point of engagement by simplifying every position into a common starting point—i.e., an "it *all* comes back to …". In other words, origin stories *frame* our narratives (their nature, values, and function) by giving them certain boundaries and a sense of homogeneity across their various parts. The origin is what ties the present to the past in a consistent, linear, and homogenous manner. Columbia 1968, as P4C's origin story, similarly frames P4C's present identity by giving it certain boundaries and a sense of homogeneity across its various expressions. It specifically highlights P4C's nature as an urgent therapeutic and pedagogical response to the various political and social ills expressed in the politics of the 60s. Columbia 1968, in other words, contextualizes the moral and pedagogical value of P4C as a beacon of hope amidst unstable political times. What is P4C? Why is P4C valuable? How might it improve the world? One might start with: "it all comes back to Columbia 1968 …" or with

> The origins of Philosophy for Children (P4C) can be traced to the global period of student unrest in 1968 when Matthew Lipman, a Philosophy professor at Columbia University, became concerned by the lack of critical thinking and reasoning evident among his students and colleagues (Mannion, 2020)

Or with

> Lipman's project, which began at Columbia University in the wake of the student unrest of the late 1960s, was to encourage young people to be more reasonable – that is, ready to reason and be reasoned with. (SAPERE)

Both stories convey a similar message by framing P4C's origin within the broader political context of the 60s. While Mannion mentions a lack of "critical thinking and reasoning" skills in both colleagues and students, SAPERE's opening puts more emphasis on the students by contextualizing P4C's commitment to "encourage young people to be more reasonable" within "the wake of the student unrest of the 1960s." Importantly, however, both stories identify P4C's commitment to reasonableness as a specific response to the lack of reasonability in the US politics of the 1960s.

While much of the literature propagates this narrative, I argue that this glorification of P4C as a solution to the social instability of the 1960s partly relies on the portrayal of Black Power philosophy and the Black power inspired activism of the SAS as unreasonable. Rather than a noble attempt to create a better world and save the university from destruction, portraying Columbia 1968 (and more specifically Black students in the SAS) as bewildered and unreasonable epistemically functions to elevate P4C's pedagogical project to therapeutic levels partially by devaluing and silencing the

successes of Black Power philosophy and activism of the 60s. *The Columbia narrative, in other words, can be read as an implicit denial of Black Power philosophy and activism as unreasonable (and thus inadequate for P4C or P4C-led conversations) by means of a de-historicized and de-contextualized perspective that overlooks the deeper underlying racial struggle that led to the event's unfolding—i.e., white ignorance.*

4. Reframing the Narrative: The Hidden Struggle of Columbia 1968

In what follows, I expand on the traditional narrative of P4C and the Columbia protest through Stefan Bradley's (2009) "Harlem vs. Columbia: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s." This section specifically delves into three important, but often missing, elements of the Columbia 1968 story in P4C discussions: 1) the history and significance of Harlem for Black Americans, 2) Columbia University's aggressive gentrification of Harlem, and 3) the SAS' relationship to the Black Power Movement of the 1960s.

a. Harlem's Value to Black America

Let's start with a discussion of Harlem as a vital site for Black American identity, culture, history, and agency. In the early 1900s, Harlem was initially a dying neighborhood. It began as a farming village that was later abandoned once the land stopped being fertile. After being annexed by New York City in 1873, it transformed into an affluent area primarily occupied by white families. High prices and low demand however created a housing bubble that burst in the early 1900s, leading landlords to accept new Black tenants accustomed to paying higher than average housing costs.

This shift alarmed other white families, prompting them to leave behind unsold, uninhabited properties. As a result, landlords significantly reduced their asking prices and began opening the door for more Black tenants to move into the neighborhood. The Great Migration that started in 1910 further contributed to the neighborhood's transformation, resulting in a "booming increase of New York City's black population to 327,000 by 1930" (compared to 60,000 three decades earlier). Consequently, "Harlem, and later Morningside Heights, became places where many black southerners eventually settled" and called home (Bradley, 2009, p. 23).

By the 1920s, the three-square-mile block of Harlem had evolved into the most prosperous center of Black identity, culture, and history in the United States. As Alain Locke recounts:

> Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the businessman, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. (Locke, 1925)

In turn, the vast influx of diverse Black families into the small neighborhood sparked a cultural revolution that not only defined Black America but the entire country—the Harlem Renaissance or

New Negro Movement. Harlem became the cultural and economic center of this new movement, offering a renewed sense of racial pride, self-determination, expression, and progressive politics. As Locke put it, in "Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination" (Ibid). Early 20th-century Harlem became a hub for the literary, musical, visual, philosophical, and political culture of a new Black America to emerge.

By the 1960s, this newfound Black consciousness had firmly imprinted itself on the minds of Black Americans across the country. The Harlem Renaissance aimed to forge a fresh Black identity crafted by and for Black people in the US; intending its influence to reach every Black individual living under the influence of white supremacy in America. This is particularly relevant since, even though none of the SAS members were originally from Harlem, they each had a deep historical relationship with the neighborhood by virtue of their identity—a sentiment that was clearly validated by the Harlem community during the takeover of Hamilton Hall when they brought food and supplies to the locked-down SAS protestors (Bradley, 2009, p. 74). In light of this history, we can begin the work of shifting the paradigm of P4C and Columbia 1968 away from the gym's segregating architecture or US overseas imperialism. Rather, we can begin to understand how both the SAS and Harlem residents were fighting together to protect and perpetuate Harlem's legacy as a site of Black identity and self-determination.

b. Columbia Eyes Harlem

Harlem's golden age would not last. The influx of heroin combined with the recession of the 1950s, pushed the neighborhood into a crisis. But Harlem's ill fortune became Columbia's opportunity. For some time now, the university's administration saw the neighborhood as a stain on its reputation.

> The Faculty Civil Rights Group of Columbia University, conducting a study on the university's policy regarding the Morningside Heights neighborhood, quoted one of the university planners, Stanley Salmen, as stating: "We are looking for a community where the faculty can talk to people like themselves. We don't want a dirty group." Given that there was only one full-time Black faculty member at Columbia by the mid-1960s, it is evident what the planner meant by "people like themselves." Moreover, considering the predominantly Black and Puerto Rican residents of Harlem and Morningside Heights, it is clear that he was referring to the nonwhite dwellers of the surrounding community as the elements of the "dirty group." (Ibid., p. 27-28)

Thus, starting in the 1950s, Columbia initiated an aggressive acquisition of Harlem and Morningside Heights properties, many of them occupied by Black and Puerto Rican residents. Bradley notes that "in the 1960s alone, the university purchased 150 housing units mostly used by Black and Puerto Ricans. Each time the school acquired housing facilities for the sake of expansion, many tenants lost their homes" (ibid., p. 28). The post-student protest Cox report reflected this, accusing the university of "unduly harassing tenants to evict them, and with icy indifference to the problems of relocation" (Cox Commission, 1968, p. 37-38). By 1968, the university had decreased occupation in its housing facilities by 70% (Bradley, 2009, p. 30).

Importantly, Columbia University's expansion circumvented any democratic decision-making process due to its alliances with other institutions, such as Barnard College, Union Theological Seminary, Jewish Theological Seminary, Teacher's College, St. Luke's Hospital, St. John the Divine Church, Corpus Christi Church, International House, Julliard School of Music, Riverside Church, and the Interchurch Center. All these entities had "investments… in the form of tenant buildings in the Morningside Heights and Harlem areas" (Ibid., p. 33). Together, these institutions formed Morningside Height Inc., and in 1965, began working on the city-approved "Morningside General Renewal Plan," which significantly favored Columbia's interests, as well as those of its partners.

> With the release of the plan, institutions, especially Columbia, could freely remove tenants as part of a city-sanctioned plan. Indeed, the plan provided even more power and official credence to Columbia as it stretched outward. (Ibid., p. 34)

In addition to Columbia's aggressive evictions of Black and Puerto Rican tenants in Harlem and Morningside Heights, the university also developed a reputation for appropriating Black economic spaces for its own profits. For example, Harlem Hospital, originally owned by the city and staffed with a few Black doctors and nurses to serve the community, underwent complete whitewashing after Columbia purchased and transformed it into a teaching hospital where mostly white medical students could practice on the predominantly Black and Puerto Rican residents. Furthermore, during "a time when black people had trouble finding jobs, seeing people from outside the community coming into work caused resentment" (Ibid., p. 36). Residents of Harlem also had broader grievances, accentuated by the gym, such as the fact that Columbia University students (a high majority of them being White) could defer their drafts, while most of Harlem's young adults (a high majority of them being Black and Hispanic) had no choice but to be drafted to Vietnam.

While the gym construction was the major event that triggered the student protest, it stood on top of several other offenses that Harlem suffered at the hands of Columbia. As Bradley puts it, "Harlem residents would not have been so skeptical about the proposed gym except that large, white institutions had a reputation for taking control of community businesses and institutions" (Ibid.). While residents turned to the democratic process and pressured elected officials to stand against the forceful overtaking of Harlem and Morningside Heights, Columbia used its own power and influence to continue its aggressive expansion unchecked.

What the SAS (and, to some extent, the SDS as well) did was not just a superficial protest against bad university policy concerning an offensive gymnasium in a public park. It was much more than this. The student protest at Columbia was, on the one hand, an act of solidarity with the Black and Puerto Rican residents of Harlem and Morningside Heights who were powerless in the face of losing yet another part of their neighborhood to Columbia University. The "unreasonability" of the SAS members, in other words, was not a sickness that the students were carrying with them, but a strategic response to the diverging interests of each group involved. As I will discuss in more detail next, neither the faculty, the SDS, nor the administration were invested in defending Harlem or the history that it represented. Likewise, none of the predominantly white groups (the SDS, the faculty, and the administration) were invested in affirming specifically pro-Black educational reforms in a majority white institution with clear hints of white supremacy. As a result of such divergences, the

SAS turned to a way of thinking that could help them achieve their goals against an overwhelmingly more powerful white institution. They would turn to the Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s which specifically aimed to affirm Black identity and self-determination within the American context of white dominance. Thus, the Columbia protest was also a struggle for Black self-affirmation and self-determination in the face of white oppression.

c. Black Power and Educational Reforms at Columbia University

Black Power is a challenging movement to define since it is not a centralized, homogenous movement but rather a globally diffused collection of heterogeneous pro-Black movements that collaborated around similar goals. In this sense, a better starting point would be to inquire as to what it rejected since it originated out of the dissatisfaction some civil rights activists had with the politics displayed by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While both organizations advocated for integration, the Black Power movement aimed to create Black life for Black people, by Black people. In other words, Black Power proponents criticized the SCLC and the NAACP for operating within the boundaries of white normativity.

> The adoption of the concept of Black Power is one of the most legitimate and healthy developments in American politics and race relations in our time … It is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society. (Ture and Hamilton, 1992, p. 42)

Instead of focusing on integration, equality, and human prosperity (values also embodied by P4C), Black Power activists emphasized *Black* freedom, *Black* self-determination, and *Black* self-sufficiency. Additionally, Black Power advocated cultural pride, direct political activism, as well as Black nationalism, art, literature, music, and popular culture. Importantly, Black Power activists' notion of "self-determination" emphasized Black people's rights to self-defense and armed resistance. As Malcolm X explained in his famous 1964 "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech: "in areas where the government has proven itself either unwilling or unable to defend the lives and the property of Negroes, it's time for Negroes to defend themselves" (Malcolm X, 1964).

This call for Black specific self-determination emerges out of the movement's rejection of "the myth of coalition" or the idea that "the best—indeed, perhaps the only—way for black people to win their political and economic rights is by forming coalitions with liberal, labor, church and other kinds of sympathetic organizations or forces, including the 'liberal left' wing of the Democratic Party" (Ture and Hamilton, 1992, p. 51). This is a myth because it assumes that in present-day America 1) "the interest of black people are identical to the interests of certain liberal, labor, and other reform groups", 2) "a viable coalition can be effected between the politically and economically secure and the politically and economically insecure", and 3) "political coalitions are or can be sustained on a moral, friendly, sentimental basis; by appeals to conscience" (Ibid.). On the contrary, a viable coalition requires that "[one] party must not blindly assume that what is good for one is automatically—without question—good for the other. Black people must first ask themselves what is good for them, and then

they can determine if the 'liberal' is willing to coalesce" (Ibid., p. 60). In essence, Black Power aimed to establish prosperity for Black people in a country that consistently failed to secure their basic rights in the face of white violence. The movement asserted that, instead of entrusting the lives of Black people to white government officials or other groups who evidently lacked a vested interest in safeguarding their rights, the Black population should affirm and protect these rights themselves.

Living up to its reputation, the Harlem community did not idly stand by as Columbia forcefully expanded into its home. Despite its decline from the heights of the 20s and 30s, Harlem continued its role as a center of Black politics and activism. Since the 40s, the community housed several chapters of Black and civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, Nation of Islam (NOI), the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the Urban League. As such, Harlem was no stranger to the Black Power movement (or civil rights activism as a whole). After all, this was where Malcolm X began advocating principles of Black power and transforming the Nation of Islam from a 400-member group in 1952 to an estimated upper bound of 300,000 members by 1964 (Ogbar, 2019, p. 38). For Harlem and the SAS, protesting the gym was an affirmative refusal of the university's lack of collaboration with the community; it was a fight for self-defense and self-affirmation in the face of white supremacy.

> If constructed, the gym, like the rest of Columbia University, would stand as a constant reminder of the affluence of white society and, in the opinion of many community residents and students, its oppressive nature. In the late 1960s the gym in the park became more than just a symbol; it also provided a rallying point for black people in the community and at the school to gain a say and some power in predominantly white America. (Bradley, 2009, p. 40)

Their actions quickly resonated with the residents of both Morningside Heights and Harlem, as well as major figures in the Black Power movement, including the 4th and 5th chairmen of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Kwame Ture and H. Rap Brown. It is important to emphasize that while the gymnasium was a central element of the protest, the SAS' goals were much broader. Inspired by the Black Power movement, the SAS "privileged the concerns of black people as a whole, whether students or community members, over the interests of the relatively small number of people on college campuses" (Ibid., p. 6-7). This was a fundamental difference that fueled the SAS' need to isolate themselves from other students, faculty, and administrators.

On the one hand, the SAS segregated themselves from the SDS to forward a movement that could empower Black Americans' right to self-determination. The SDS, on its end, was more concerned with radicalizing other white students to their cause. "The fact that SDS used the gymnasium … as a means to move its goal" of radicalizing white students was seen by many SAS members as another example of white appropriation (Ibid., p. 7). The difference in goals also led to organizational disputes. While most white students in the SDS wanted to organize a sit-in in Hamilton, the SAS encouraged a barricade of the building. For the former, a sit-in would have allowed students to enter, thus enabling the SDS to potentially radicalize some of them. For the latter, the goal was the affirmation of Black voices against Columbia's aggressive takeover and its deterritorialization of Harlem's residents. For this reason, taking the building hostage was deemed a more effective and sustainable strategy since they could use its occupation as leverage in the

negotiations. Crucially, however, this was not a rejection of solidarity or aid, but a desire for it "on their own terms" (Ibid., p. 77).

On the other hand, the SAS rejected the terms offered by the faculty and did not care to negotiate with them since their proposal simply sought to end the superficial conflict of the gym. As we can recall, the AHFG resolution asked, "that students vacate the building in exchange for Columbia's withdrawal from IDA, the cancellation of gym construction, creating tripartite disciplinary procedures, [and] collective and uniform disciplinary action that precluded serious consequences for protest leaders" (Alston, 2015). This resolution was quickly rejected by both the SAS and SDS due to a lack of substantial reforms offered by the faculty. But the SAS more specifically knew that neither the faculty nor the administration were invested in affirming Black-centric reforms within the University. As Bradley notes, while the "members of the faculty and admissions office, in their own opinion, had been doing all they could to help black people advance in American society … [by] protesting what the faculty and admissions office believed was their best, SAS made them aware that they were not, in fact, keeping time with society" (Ibid., pp. 131-132).

As a result of this Black-centric collaboration, the SAS successfully compelled the university to terminate the gym's construction in Morningside Park, but also achieved much more.

> In an alliance with the black community of Harlem, student and community activists would attain Black Power in its most essential form … [as] members of the black intelligentsia and the working class, they were able to manifest power by using their race to invoke fear and reconsideration in a powerful white institution, and this was extremely rare for black people in the United States. (Ibid., p. 9)

The termination of the gym was the mere tip of the iceberg. Surprisingly, both President Kirk and Vice President David Truman resigned from their posts following the protest. More importantly, the SAS' actions opened the door for dialogue and collaboration between SAS members and the faculty and administration. The racially charged nature of the protest heightened many white administrators' fears of a race riot, especially considering that the events took place a few weeks after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. *By taking over Hamilton, cooperating with the local community, and playing "on the administrator's fear of a race riot spilling into campus," the SAS had opened the door for the dialogue and collaboration that Lipman blamed the students for lacking* (Bradley, 2009, p. 9). After the protest, the SAS began to "work within the University framework" and was able to demand "admissions, financial aid, and campus space concessions" (Wilk and Golia, 2010). Feeding off this momentum, the SAS then began to push "the university to restructure its curriculum to include an independent black studies major and also to allow for the acceptance into the university of more black and Puerto Rican students from local high schools" (Bradley, 2009, p. 19). By the next year, "the university satisfied more of the black student group's demands, showing again the benefits of racial separation in student protests" (Ibid.).

5. Columbia 1968, Black Power, and P4C's Notion of Reasonableness

While it is easy to overlook the broader racial context due to the popular narrative's focus on the gymnasium, the Columbia protest wasn't simply about the gym, its location, or its architecture. For SAS members and the broader Harlem community, it was a battle within the wider struggle against white supremacy. Importantly, this struggle, which was fought along the lines of Black Power philosophy and activism, paved the way for actual systemic reforms within the university. This success wasn't isolated to Columbia but was widespread across multiple Black Power inspired student protests with the implementation of Black studies programs across the country being one of the movement's most significant educational reforms (Rojas, 2010). These struggles were the battlefield upon which pro-Black empowerment in university settings was fought and won—not destructive attempts to protest bad university policies as some P4C thinkers have made it out to be.

Given the success of Black Power activism and philosophy in opening dialogical avenues and realizing educational reforms in American universities we are left to ask, what was so unreasonable about Columbia 1968 and the SAS' actions? Or more importantly, how does portraying the Black power activism as unreasonable elevate P4C as a beacon of hope for educational reform? First, Lipman's and his followers' narrative indiscriminately blends students, faculty, and administrators into a mix of equal blame and responsibility. The story itself is hard to find with only a few mentions of it here and there. Even when it is discussed there are virtually no details other than the ones mentioned in the citations provided here. There is no mention of Harlem, its populations, or its history; no mentions of the Harlem Renaissance, Columbia's gentrification attempts, the SAS, the SDS, the broader community support for the students, and all of the white violence that led to the protest. By overlooking the deeper racial struggle underlying Columbia 1968, the story presents a white supremacist administration, an all-white faculty group, a white liberal leftist student organization, and a pro-Black student organization as equally unreasonable. We can only believe this if we overlook the history provided above.

Inspired by Black Power philosophy, the SAS took action to defend Harlem and Morningside Heights from the university's aggressive and racially motivated gentrification. As a result, equating the actions of a racist administration with those of pro-Black SAS student activists presents an evident problem. Similarly, comparing white supremacy with pro-Black activism in terms of their reasonableness should raise some eyebrows. But more importantly, the indiscriminate label of unreasonableness misrepresents the differences between each group's respective motivations, strategies, tactics, and goals. The administration wanted to gentrify Harlem and Morningside Heights for the sake of profit and racial purity, the faculty wanted to end the occupation through empty negotiations, the SDS was motivated by the Vietnam War to radicalize other students through sit-ins, and the SAS was motivated to fight anti-Black racism in the US and wanted the university to start taking Black voices more seriously. The absence of these important details debases the nature of the struggle and thus easily supports the idea that there was widespread unreasonableness during the 1968 Columbia University student protest. In other words, by overlooking the deeper racial struggle that underlies Columbia 1968 we can easily miss the incommensurable divergence of interest that resides at its core. This makes it easy to interpret the SAS' actions as unreasonable and bewildered due to the

reasons presented in section 2. However, like in *Tusk Tusk*, "the absence of culture, geography, power imbalances, indigenous and non-indigenous, religion, language diversity, history and racism" in the P4C narrative of Columbia 1968 "leads to allegories of racism that have simplified [it] to the point of falsifying" (Chetty, 2014, p. 24).

Second, the idea that everyone was equally bewildered and unreasonable deceives P4C practitioners into believing that no successful reforms came out of the student riots. It, in other words, erases the tangible progress effected by SAS students as a way to further intensify the urgency of P4C. This is not to say that P4C's value or urgency cannot be derived from other sources. However, by identifying a lack of viable "reasonable" solutions in the student's actions, the Columbia narrative not only overlooks the deeper racial struggle at play but also silences the very strategies, tactics, and community-centric efforts that led to successful pro-Black reforms at Columbia University. Without knowing that the student protest led to positive structural reforms in American universities, it becomes easier to prescribe P4C as a possible and urgently needed cure to the apparent widespread unreasonableness.

Finally, the Columbia 1968 narrative creates an epistemic obstacle for the adoption of Black Power philosophy into P4C. By interpreting the SAS' actions as unreasonable, it essentially discredits Black power philosophy as a-priori unfit for P4C. This is further supported by Lipman's own denial of the philosophical relevance of Columbia 1968 for P4C. In an interview with Felix Garcia Moriyon, Lipman, to Moriyon's surprise, said: "I cannot think of any significant relationship between doing philosophy with children and sociopolitical problems at Columbia in the 1960s" (Lipman and Garcia Moriyon, 2012, p. 27). Lipman elaborates that while there is a causal relationship between Columbia 1968 and the creation of P4C, "there was no 1-to-1 correlation between any ideas in Harry and the Columbia riots" (Ibid.). In other words, while the events at Columbia motivated him to improve education and create P4C, none of the philosophical reasoning for these reforms was drawn from the student protest or the Black Power ideology that partially supported it. Since Lipman probably saw the Black Power philosophy fueling the student protests as a product of the widespread unreasonableness plaguing the US education system, it would make sense that he vehemently isolated himself and P4C from it.[1]

This is not all to say that the Black Power Movement was reasonable or that we should assimilate its philosophy into P4C. Questions concerning the Black Power movement's reasonability or its possible relationship with P4C are complicated and not addressed here. My goal has simply been to show that the notion of reasonability at the heart of P4C is being deployed to discredit successful Black Power inspired educational reforms. Given P4C's commitment to reforming education, the literature's oversight of the Columbia events thus holds significant weight. It reveals how the implicit values of P4C can blind us to our own biases and the realities faced by other groups. Lipman and his followers might have enjoyed the luxury of believing in the power of dialogue to affirm their own voices. However, the SAS members and, more crucially, the Black and Puerto Rican residents of Harlem and Morningside Heights were not afforded this luxury. Consequently, despite the best

[1] For a more detailed discussion of Lipman's thoughts on race and education see Chapter 6 of his autobiography *A Life of Teaching* (Lipman, 2008).

intentions, this prevalent narrative of P4C's origins has unconsciously dismissed the concrete and successful pro-Black activism of the SAS and the Harlem and Morningside Heights communities. In essence, both this narrative and its oversimplification of the event serve as exemplars of Chetty's critique of reasonableness as a concept "constituted by and reinscribing the epistemological features of white ignorance" and supremacy (Chetty, 2018, p. 52).

* I would like to acknowledge and thank Corbin Convington for their time and invaluable feedback on the paper and its engagement with the Black Power movement of the 1960s

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Address Correspondences to:
Dr. Jonathan Wurtz,
Assistant Professor of Philosophy,
University of Guam
Email: wurtzj@triton.uog.edu