On Campus

How Do You Celebrate a University?

Spring 2004

By doing what an academic community does best: posing questions and looking for answers. In an outpouring of symposia, books, films, and interactive Web features, Columbia continues to observe its 250th anniversary with events that spark informed debate.

So when the University hosts a four-part series of discussions of noteworthy turning points in Columbia's own past, to whom do we turn? To leading historians on the Columbia and Barnard faculty who can guide conversation about subjects they know best. To invited respondents and audience members. And to visitors to the C250 Web site, who can carry on the discourse long after the close of each evening in Low Library.

In this spring's history series Columbia 250 Co-chair Kenneth T. Jackson, editor of *The Encyclopedia of New York City* and now completing a term as president of the New-York Historical Society, considers the University's relationship to New York City in the period between the Civil War and the Progressive Era. Rosalind Rosenberg, who has long devoted herself to historical study of gender at the University, hosts the session on Columbia's shift from an institution of Episcopalian social elites to a more inclusive one. Provost Alan Brinkley, Columbia's chief academic officer, discusses the University's place in the 1950s at the peak of American intellectual inquiry. And Robert McCaughey, who specializes in the history of academic institutions, examines the events of 1968 and its implications for students going forward.

Each session subjects key aspects of Columbia's identity—in relation to our City, our nation, and our students—to renewed examination, kicking off discussions that will prove useful as the University faces new challenges. Whether it's plans for the new campus in Manhattanville, persistent issues of diversity on campus, Columbia's profile, or a host of other issues, our past experience remains a useful guide as the University launches into a new chapter in its history. We look to refine Columbia's

collective biography not just for its own sake, but because it can help us make thoughtful decisions about the pressing issues of today, on campus and in the world.

As history series moderator Robert McCaughey puts it, “If it is true that Columbia’s history is too important to be left to Columbia historians, it is no less true that Columbia historians—indeed, all Columbians—need to join in an ongoing effort of critically engaging our past. To do so can only inform our thinking, as Columbians and Americans, about our future.”

The record of these debates, featured on the C250 Web site, join such recent treatments as McCaughey’s Stand, Columbia, the new single-volume history of the University; Rosenberg’s *Changing the Subject: How the Women of Columbia Shaped the Way We Think About Sex and Politics*, set for publication this fall, and *Pulitzer’s School: Columbia University’s School of Journalism*, *1903–2003*, by James Boylan ’51JRN, published by Columbia University Press in 2003.

We expect people to keep stirring the pot long after these few sessions are over. It’s all part of the effort, furthered by all who choose to participate, to get Columbia’s story right—or at least a little more right every day.



Guide to school abbreviations

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