Arts & Humanities

Virginia Gildersleeve: Opening the Gates

Virginia Crocheron Gildersleeve '99BAR '00 '08GSAS, dean of Barnard College and adviser to Columbia Women Graduate Students from 1911 to 1947, did more to advance the cause of women at Columbia University than any other person of her time.

By
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|
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"If I have been privileged to open some of the gates of knowledge and experience for youth it is largely because, when I was young, the gates were opened wide for me by the college and university in which I worked for over fifty years."

-Virginia Crosheron Gildersleeve
Many a Good Crusade (1954)

In 1911 undergraduate education for women had been available for only two decades and many graduate courses and professional schools remained closed to them. By the time Gildersleeve retired 36 years later, Columbia was granting more advanced degrees to women and hiring more female faculty than any other university in the United States. This achievement had much to do with Columbia's situation in New York City, long the country's most ethnically diverse metropolis, its economic heart, its media capital, and its principal haven for ambitious, rebellious, heterodox women. New York's opportunities enabled women to make important advances in all of the city's colleges and universities. Their achievements were greatest, perhaps, at Columbia, and Gildersleeve's successful use of Barnard College as a staging ground for her campaign on behalf of female graduate students and faculty goes a long way toward explaining why.

Born in 1877, the daughter of Judge Henry Alger Gildersleeve and Virginia Crocheron, Gildersleeve grew up in a town house on West 48th Street near Fifth Avenue. "We . . . were not 'in society' exactly," Gildersleeve later recalled, "we were professional people." She prepared for college at the Brearley School and upon graduation in 1895 thought of attending Bryn Mawr, but her mother preferred that she stay closer to home. Her father had attended Columbia Law School, and her older brother Harry graduated from the College in 1890. She had once accompanied Harry to the College's library on 49th Street, where the shaded green lights and rows of books had deeply impressed her. So she enrolled at Barnard, which had just opened its doors a few blocks away on Madison Avenue. Gildersleeve followed the College when it moved uptown to elegant new quarters alongside Columbia on Morningside Heights a couple of years later, and there she studied European history with James Harvey Robinson, sociology with Franklin Giddings, and history of philosophy with Nicholas Murray Butler. She graduated first in her class in 1899, and the offer of a graduate fellowship prompted her to stay on at Columbia, where she received a master's degree in history in 1900. After five years of teaching first-year composition at Barnard, she returned to Columbia for a Ph.D. in English, which she earned in 1908. Her dissertation, "Government Regulation of Elizabethan Drama," signaled a lifelong interest in interdisciplinary studies. Not wanting to leave home, she turned down an associate professorship in English at the University of Wisconsin, despite being warned that academic advancement required a willingness to move from school to school at the beginning of one's career. Instead, she pieced together teaching assignments at Barnard and in Columbia's graduate program in English, until an assistant professorship in English opened at Barnard in 1910. She assumed the position of dean of Barnard College and Adviser to Women Graduate Students at Columbia in 1911.

Women and politics

When Gildersleeve took over the stewardship of Barnard College, the woman's movement was in full flower and both parents and trustees were anxious about the movement's possible corrupting effects on young women. Gildersleeve had barely settled into her new office when the distraught mother of a student arrived at her door. The mother implored her to forbid Barnard students from participating in a planned suffrage parade down Fifth Avenue. To "march in a parade would be a

shocking and shameful thing" for the students to do and would "injure the college greatly," the distressed mother warned. Nor was this mother alone in opposing student support for woman suffrage. At Vassar College administrators so feared adverse publicity should their students become involved in the unladylike world of political activism that student supporters of the suffrage movement had to hold organizational meetings in the local graveyard to avoid detection. And at Barnard itself, members of the Board of Trustees opposed Barnard students having anything to do with woman suffrage. Foremost among these opponents was Trustee Annie Nathan Meyer. Although Meyer had led the campaign to open Barnard College in the late 1880s, she opposed woman suffrage on the grounds that it fostered sex antagonism. Notwithstanding Meyer's outspoken views, Gildersleeve refused to interfere with student suffragists; indeed, she encouraged faculty and students to engage freely, not only in the fight for suffrage, but in all the political movements of the day. In contrast to Vassar, with its ban on all suffrage activity, Gildersleeve's Barnard boasted a chapter of the New York State Woman Suffrage League and an openly acknowledged Socialist League. And in the area of campus known as the Jungle (where Lehman Library now stands) many a stump speaker defended a controversial cause. For all Gildersleeve's openness to heterodox political views, she had ambivalent feelings toward feminism. She rejected the confrontational tactics of those like Alice Paul and her followers who, following the example of British suffragists, courted arrest as they castigated public officials for not supporting women's right to vote. British-born Barnard English professor Caroline Spurgeon, who became Gildersleeve's companion in the 1920s, once chided the Barnard dean that she "did not appreciate the need of militant feminism because she had not been trampled upon enough." Gildersleeve countered that she "was not battering at the doors from without but working from within." To be effective she thought it essential "to avoid as far as possible creating antagonisms" for, as she later recalled, "most of my colleagues outside of Barnard had to be handled rather gently.

New York in the 1910s fairly burst with political, cultural, and economic energy. For women this energy produced unprecedented opportunities in journalism, publishing, education, retailing, law, medicine, and social work. Determined that her students should be prepared to take advantage of whatever chance might become available, Gildersleeve organized a Committee on Women Graduate Students, to which she recruited Barnard Professor of Geology Ida H. Ogilvie and two male colleagues, James Harvey Robinson from Barnard and John Dewey from Columbia. Together they worked to advance women's interests in the graduate faculties and open Columbia's

professional schools. The School of Journalism admitted women when it opened in 1912, and the School of Business did the same when it opened in 1916. Winning entry sometimes took more, however, than a simple decree that women might take classes. The School of Journalism, for instance, required a course in government as a prerequisite. Barnard did not at that time offer any such course, government being a subject thought suitable only for the male students at Columbia. But taking advantage of the Board of Trustees' desire to win admission for Barnard women to Columbia professional schools whenever possible, Gildersleeve quietly hired one of Robinson's students, Charles Beard, to teach Barnard's first course in American government.

Addressing the men of Phi Beta Kappa, Gildersleeve saw a chance to press her case further in 1915, when the Columbia Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa asked her to be the first woman ever to address them at their annual convocation. In welcoming her as that year's speaker, Professor Harold Webb '05C '09GSAS of the Columbia physics department sent her a list of the subjects of prior addresses to serve as a guide. These subjects included "Competition in College," "New Humanities for Old," and, most recently, "The College Man's Opportunity in Public Life." Having reviewed these titles, Gildersleeve selected her own: "Some Guides for Feminine Energy." Gildersleeve's address was a genteel, but nonetheless clear declaration of war on the male-led university. She began by pointing out that 1915 was not only the year of the Great War in Europe, but also the year of the 25th anniversary of Barnard's founding. And therefore, she declared, "Speaking . . . as a representative of a feminine college on a feminine anniversary, I feel committed to a feminine subject, and for this I crave your indulgence."

As most of her listeners would have been aware, "feminine energy" had been a matter of obsessive concern among academics for many years. Back in 1873, Dr. Edward Clarke of the Harvard Medical School had published a book in which he claimed that the higher education of women would kill off the middle class. Basing his dark prophecy on a view, widely held among physicians at the time, that the body is a closed energy system, he explained that energy available for one task-the development of a woman's mind-would not be available for another: the development of her reproductive organs. In short, the mental strain of higher education would inevitably render women students infertile. The prospect of infertility raised, in turn, the specter of "race suicide," which was the belief that middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants were marching toward extinction as a

consequence of their declining birth rate. According to President Theodore Roosevelt, there would soon not be enough sons to go to Harvard. Angry, but undaunted, talented young women had been flooding the colleges ever since, distinguishing themselves academically and, in due course, maternally. However, concern about the limits of feminine energy lingered, especially in the minds of male academics. Could women really be expected to excel academically, given the reproductive and domestic demands on their energies? This was the question that Gildersleeve was implicitly addressing in her speech.

Her answer was a simple yes; women had plenty of energy; indeed, their energy sought new outlets, since the technological change of the previous generation had removed the great bulk of domestic work from the home. A learned woman could read by an electric light, rather than having to devote winter afternoons to making candles. A learned woman could even, with a clear conscience, abjure motherhood now that improved public health and declining infant mortality made it unnecessary to breed as many children as once had been the case. In the modern world women could have the same ambitions as men. Having laid down the gauntlet in her Phi Beta Kappa address, Gildersleeve began to move on several fronts: scheming first to open the remaining professional schools to women, second to create opportunities on the faculty, and finally to press for broader opportunities in the world.

Law and medicine

As a member of the University Council, Gildersleeve met regularly with the deans of all the schools that composed the university, and at every opportunity she mentioned the importance of extending greater educational advantages to Barnard students. The dean of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Dr. Samuel Lambert '23P&S, seemed sympathetic, but insisted that change must await the school's move to larger quarters. New York women had been pressing the medical school to open its doors ever since1873, when suffrage leader Lillie Devereux Blake petitioned the Columbia Trustees on behalf of a group of women, including one who wanted to attend the medical school, that Columbia's charter made the institution available to the "youth of the city," a group that should be read to include women. Unwilling to wait any longer, Gildersleeve told the dean in 1917 that "a brilliant young Swedish woman, Gulli Lindh," was about to graduate from Barnard and attend the Johns Hopkins Medical School, but that she would rather stay in New York. The dean

responded that he would be happy to have her and others, but that, at a minimum, he had to provide additional laboratory space and a woman's rest room. Gildersleeve, assisted by the American Women's Medical Association, offered to raise the necessary $50,000, and the medical school took Lindh, as well as five others to keep her company. Four years later, Lindh graduated first in the class, and two of the other women graduated third and fifth.

Dean Harlan Stone and his law school faculty proved more resistant to Gildersleeve's blandishments. In 1915 President Butler lent Gildersleeve his support by calling a meeting at his home of the Educational Committee of the Columbia Trustees and several of the more senior members of the law school to discuss the matter of women's admission. Butler and the Trustees favored the change, but the law faculty, fearful that admitting women would cause their best male students to flee to all-male Harvard, flatly refused. Gildersleeve's wry suggestion that the two schools hold hands and take the dangerous step toward coeducation together did not receive a favorable reply. Indeed, in a letter the following week Stone advised her that the majority of his faculty viewed coeducation as "unwise" and warned against further "agitation" on the matter. Although Yale Law School's decision to admit women in 1917 drew positive notices from the press, Columbia Law School refused to follow its example. By 1924, the year Gildersleeve laid the cornerstone of a dormitory to help house Columbia's exploding female graduate population, women's enrollments at the University outpaced men's by 18,000 to 15,194. But still Columbia Law School refused to open its doors.

It took another two years of determined effort, including a Barnard faculty petition appealing to the law faculty's sense of justice, before Columbia Law School grudgingly and narrowly agreed in December 1926 to admit not women in general but only those Barnard students who were particularly recommended by the dean of Barnard College. Law School Dean Huger Jervey warned Gildersleeve against giving any publicity to her victory. He did not want "the appearance created that the law school had determined at this time generally to admit women equally with men." Gildersleeve complied, and sent only her best graduate, Helen Robinson '27BAR '30L, for admission in the fall of 1927. But word of the law school's action got out, and two female Columbia graduate students, one with a master's degree, the other with a doctorate, sought admission. Jervey found them too well qualified to turn away. Margaret Spahr '26GSAS '29L, who already had received master's and doctoral degrees from Columbia, was the first woman to graduate from the law

school. She did so in two years, and in the process became the first woman to serve as an editor of the Columbia Law Review. In 1942, the last professional school holdout, the School of Engineering, succumbed to the Gildersleeve treatment and admitted female students.

Creating the WAVES

Scholars have written a great deal in the past two decades on the importance of World War II in opening up jobs in war industries to women; this was the era of Rosie the Riveter. Much more important in the long run, though, was the chance created by the war to open science to women. Predictably, Gildersleeve played an important role in that effort. In articles, radio broadcasts, and speeches she hammered away at her favorite wartime theme: to win the war the nation needed "trained brains"; to have enough, the country would have to turn to its women.

Gildersleeve did everything she could to keep her students in school, to dissuade them from quitting to take a job in a factory-no matter how glamorous wartime propaganda made the job seem. She also did everything she could to keep from losing her students to marriage. She seems to have accepted the fact that, given the wartime pressures, marriage to departing soldiers would occur; she simply drew the line at students following their new husbands to wherever they might be sent. In her view young wives were far better off at Barnard, completing their education, than they were staying near some military camp on the other side of the country.

The war offered Barnard an unprecedented chance to turn out physicists, chemists, and mathematicians who could have their pick of good jobs. Gildersleeve was aware of the Manhattan Project across the street at Columbia and the fact that women were being hired to work on it. She knew that there was a pressing need for engineers,and she used this knowledge to win women admission to Columbia's School of Engineering. She housed one of the country's foremost code-breaking programs at Barnard. She found jobs for anthropologists with the army and navy, which were desperately seeking specialists who could advise their aviators how to get along with the peoples of the South Pacific. She established one of the country's first programs in international relations to prepare women for the Foreign Service. And she won a place for women in the armed forces by helping to found the WAVES, the navy's female reserve officers' corps. The WAVES, under Gildersleeve's

leadership, became a military branch of the Seven Sisters. Gildersleeve served as president of its advisory board. Its highest-ranking officer was the much younger president of Wellesley, Mildred McAfee; its second in command was Gildersleeve's close friend, English Professor Elizabeth Reynard; its officers were all college graduates or had at least two years of college with two more years of professional or business experience.

Gildersleeve had no illusions about what would happen to women's opportunities after the war: they would shrink, perhaps even disappear. But, she insisted, where opportunity remained, her students were going to have as big a competitive advantage as she and the educational resources at her command could assure.

"We the People of the United Nations"

The opportunity to build on the accomplishments of the war came in February 1945 when Franklin Roosevelt named Gildersleeve to the U.S. delegation to write the United Nations Charter. The only woman named to the delegation, Gildersleeve won her spot through both her war work and her reputation as an internationalist. That reputation dated back to1916 when, influenced by Nicholas Murray Butler, Gildersleeve had begun speaking to Barnard students about establishing an international organization, even before America entered World War I. A "league to enforce peace," she called it. She thought it should include an international court, but she also advocated establishing an organization that would foster contact among nations, even when there were no outstanding disputes. Many women leaders of her day, including most notably Jane Addams, were pacifists. Gildersleeve was not. But she strongly supported the League of Nations and worked on postwar committees to lobby the American public on its behalf. That work failed, but Gildersleeve enjoyed greater success within academia. When the war ended, a delegation of British educators came to the United States in search of innovations that might be usefully transplanted to England. One of these educators was Caroline Spurgeon, a Shakespeare scholar. Meeting Spurgeon allowed Gildersleeve to broach the topic most on her mind: the need to establish an organization that would foster international cooperation among like-minded academic women. Gildersleeve imagined an organization built on the model of the American Association of Collegiate Alumnae; Spurgeon had in mind her own British Federation of University Women. In 1919 they created the International Federation of University Women

(IFUW), housing it in London with a second home in Paris at Reid Hall. For two decades, between World War I and World War II, Gildersleeve worked through the IFUW to keep alive the spirit of international understanding, even as isolationism gripped her country. She twice served as president of the IFUW, became a trustee of the American College for Girls in Turkey, as well as the Near East College Association, and traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East. When war came again, Gildersleeve joined the Commission to Study the Organization of the Peace, headed by Barnard History Professor James T. Shotwell. Longtime colleagues and friends, Shotwell and Gildersleeve had taken the same seminar on medieval Europe taught by James Harvey Robinson in 1900. During World War II they met once a month with fellow commissioners, who included Owen Lattimore, an Asia specialist for the Office of War Information who would later be falsely charged by Joseph McCarthy as a Russian spy; John Foster Dulles, a Wall Street lawyer who would go on to be Dwight D. Eisenhower's Secretary of State; and Max Lerner, a syndicated columnist for the New York Post, to plan America's participation in a world organization following the war. The committee's recommendations influenced the work undertaken at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, which in turn became the basis of the UN Charter proposals she and the world's delegates took up in 1945.

Shortly before Gildersleeve was to leave for San Francisco, a celebration was held in her honor at the Commodore Hotel. There she was feted by, among others, William Allan Neilson, who had been her dissertation adviser at Columbia and was the past president of Smith College. Neilson noted that Gildersleeve's appointment gave recognition to the increasing importance of academically trained experts in politics and the increasing influence of women in world affairs. Neilson regretted that Gildersleeve would be the only woman on the U.S. delegation, "but that will not matter," he concluded, "if only the men will listen."

The delegates were charged with writing a charter that addressed two issues: to prevent future wars through the creation of a Security Council and to enhance human welfare through the establishment of an Economic and Social Council. Gildersleeve was assigned to the committee responsible for creating this second council-the one, as she put it, in charge of doing things rather than preventing things from being done. She took particular pride in helping insert into the charter's statement of purpose the following goals for people around the world: "higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development." Moreover, she persuaded the delegates to adopt the following

aim for the UN: "universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." Gildersleeve endorsed these goals not only for their importance to the enhancement of human welfare, but also because she saw them as providing job opportunities for all the women who had been training to be health professionals, research scientists, lawyers, teachers, and social workers. She was advocating an international Works Progress Administration for educated women. To carry out its work the council was given the power to appoint whatever commissions it deemed necessary, but Gildersleeve insisted that the charter require the appointment of one in particular: the Commission on Human Rights. This commission, under the direction of Eleanor Roosevelt, would write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. This declaration, in turn, was to serve as the basis for all of the UN's work on behalf of women throughout the world over the next two generations.

Establishing the Commission on Human Rights may have been Gildersleeve's most enduring accomplishment at the conference, but the achievement that most cheered her English professor's heart was her success, with her aide, Barnard English Professor Elizabeth Reynard, in drafting the opening lines of the United Nation Charter's Preamble. In place of the version suggested by Marshall Smuts of South Africa, which read "The High Contracting Parties, determined to prevent a recurrence of the fratricidal strife which twice in our generation has brought untold sorrow and loss upon mankind. . . ." she offered the simpler, more democratic, and more American, "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which in our time has brought untold sorrow to mankind. . . ." The Smuts version rounded off the preamble, much to Gildersleeve's distress, but at least she and Reynard had succeeded in crafting the opening lines.

Gildersleeve's contributions to women's rights and international peace owed much to her experience on Morningside Heights. Though born and raised in the comfortable confines of New York's Episcopalian upper crust, she gained a far broader perspective on the world as a student. She later credited her mentor, historian James Harvey Robinson, for teaching her tolerance and the capacity through careful scholarship to put herself in the place of others from very different cultural backgrounds. Robinson's influence shaped her career.

Signs of the times

While opportunities for women blossomed during Gildersleeve's administration, minority admission figures at Barnard continued to reflect the wider realities of her time. Barnard had only a few black students while Gildersleeve served as dean, most notably novelist Zora Neale Hurston '28BAR, who entered Barnard in 1925 on a full scholarship arranged by Annie Nathan Meyer. Pauli Murray, who would go on to be one of the outstanding civil rights lawyers and feminist leaders of her generation, was turned away in 1927 for want of funds and the inadequate preparation she had received in the segregated schools of Durham, North Carolina. In the 1930s, civil rights activists apparently convinced Gildersleeve of the need both to recruit talented black students and to provide full scholarships to enable them to attend. Pressed by students in the early 1940s to do more, Gildersleeve paid for the full scholarship of at least one black student from Harlem out of her own pocket. But by the time Gildersleeve retired, Barnard still had only eight black students in its student body of 1,400.

Jews played a central role at Barnard from the beginning. Annie Nathan Meyer led the campaign to found Barnard, and banker Jacob Schiff served as the first treasurer of the Board of Trustees. Barnard students, led by future Nation editor Freda Kirchwey '15bar, abolished sororities on campus in 1915, because of their undemocratic spirit, secrecy, and attitude toward Hebrew members. Gildersleeve, herself, disdained religious exclusivity and refused to categorize her students in any explicit way. Nonetheless, an implicit categorization, one based on class, clearly existed at Barnard. Sephardic and German Jews who had attended private schools won admission to Barnard without difficulty. But the daughters of Eastern European immigrants who had attended New York City's public schools encountered greater resistance, especially as their numbers began to rise. Compared to most of the other elite women's colleges of the time, Barnard appears to have been relatively open; by the mid-1930s the proportion of Jews was roughly 20 percent compared to 6 to 10 percent at most other women's colleges. Barnard looks less open, however, when one considers that Jewish enrollment at Columbia College had reached 40 percent before World War I. At that point, both Columbia and Barnard began recruiting students from outside New York City and by evaluating all applicants on the basis of psychological tests, interviews, and letters of recommendation, as well as academic criteria. In the two decades before World War II, this process of selective admissions had reduced the percentage of Jewish students at both Columbia and Barnard to 20

percent.

Making Columbia a vanguard for women

However uneven Gildersleeve's record may have been with respect to advancing the interests of minorities, she deserves much of the credit for the fact that, during her tenure as dean of Barnard College, Columbia dramatically outpaced other universities in the advanced degrees it awarded to women, both in raw numbers and in the percentage of degrees awarded. Under her leadership, Barnard had one of the highest ratios of female to total faculty in the country, and that faculty prided itself on offering opportunity to talented women not available even at most other women's colleges. This concentration of women scholars gave many Barnard students the confidence to think that they too might pursue academic careers. To keep faculty standards high, a 1922 agreement reiterated the right of Barnard professors to teach in the graduate faculties and gave Columbia departments an important say in Barnard tenure decisions. This policy increased the status of those women professors on the Barnard faculty who won promotion to tenured positions, but at a price. Gildersleeve was perfectly frank in keeping women relegated, disproportionately, to the lower ranks. To maintain close relations with Columbia she needed to be able to attract top-flight male scholars and pay them more. She knew that given Barnard's situation in New York City she would always have an ample pool of talented women to fill the lower ranks. Sociologist Mirra Komarovsky '26BAR, a Russian immigrant, had published two books before she could persuade Gildersleeve to promote her to assistant professor.

At the same time, however, Gildersleeve was entirely supportive when it came to marriage and motherhood. In the 1910s, when the New York Public Schools still barred married women from teaching, Gildersleeve insisted that a woman's marital status was entirely her own business. This had not always been the case. When Barnard Dean Emily Smith had married in 1900, the Board of Trustees had encouraged her to continue her work, but under her successor, Laura Drake Gill, who served as dean from 1901 until 1907, married women were not so fortunate. In 1906 Gill demanded the resignation of physicist Harriet Brooks, over the vehement protest of Brook's department chair, Margaret Maltby, when Brooks announced her intention to marry. In contrast, married female faculty members became common under

Gildersleeve's tenure. Some were even mothers, and in 1931 Gildersleeve began to consider ways of helping women to balance family and career. At about the same time that she agreed to grant a paid leave of absence to a male professor who was in the hospital, a female member of the staff asked for the usual leave of absence without salary because she was going to have a child. "It suddenly struck me as unfair that you should receive full salary if you went to the hospital because of illness but that if you went in order to provide another citizen for the community, you should lose all your pay." She raised the matter with President Butler, who "looked a little startled." But when Gildersleeve mentioned to him that France was providing such a benefit to its female teachers, Butler readily agreed. "We should have women teachers with fuller lives and richer experience, not so many dried-up old maids," he opined. Gildersleeve recorded this remark in her memoir without comment, her victory evidently having trumped the implicit insult from her boss and old friend. With the help of Barnard Trustees and staunch feminists Helen Rogers Reid '03BAR '49HON and Alice Duer Miller '99BAR, Gildersleeve persuaded the Barnard Board of Trustees to enact a maternity policy that provided one term off at full pay or a year off at half pay for all new faculty mothers. In the first year three women took advantage of this new policy. Curiously, the policy was reduced in 1953 under the leadership of Millicent McIntosh '58HON, the mother of five, in one of Barnard's periodic budget reduction efforts. The revised policy allowed for leave at half pay, with the time off to be determined in consultation with the dean of the faculty. Although students later remembered McIntosh, rather than Gildersleeve, as the champion of the working mother, Gildersleeve deserves the greater credit for initiating policies that helped make the combination work. By the 1970s, faculty women who gave birth in those years later recalled, the pattern was ten days leave with one course reduction. But even so, Barnard remained rare among institutions of higher education in acknowledging that it had faculty who might be mothers and who had special needs.

A new generation of American women

Barnard's relationship with Columbia, together with Columbia's situation in New York, helped produce an unusually high concentration of female academics on Morningside Heights, compared to the numbers of faculty elsewhere in the country. This concentration helped fuel a revolution of rising expectations that insured that

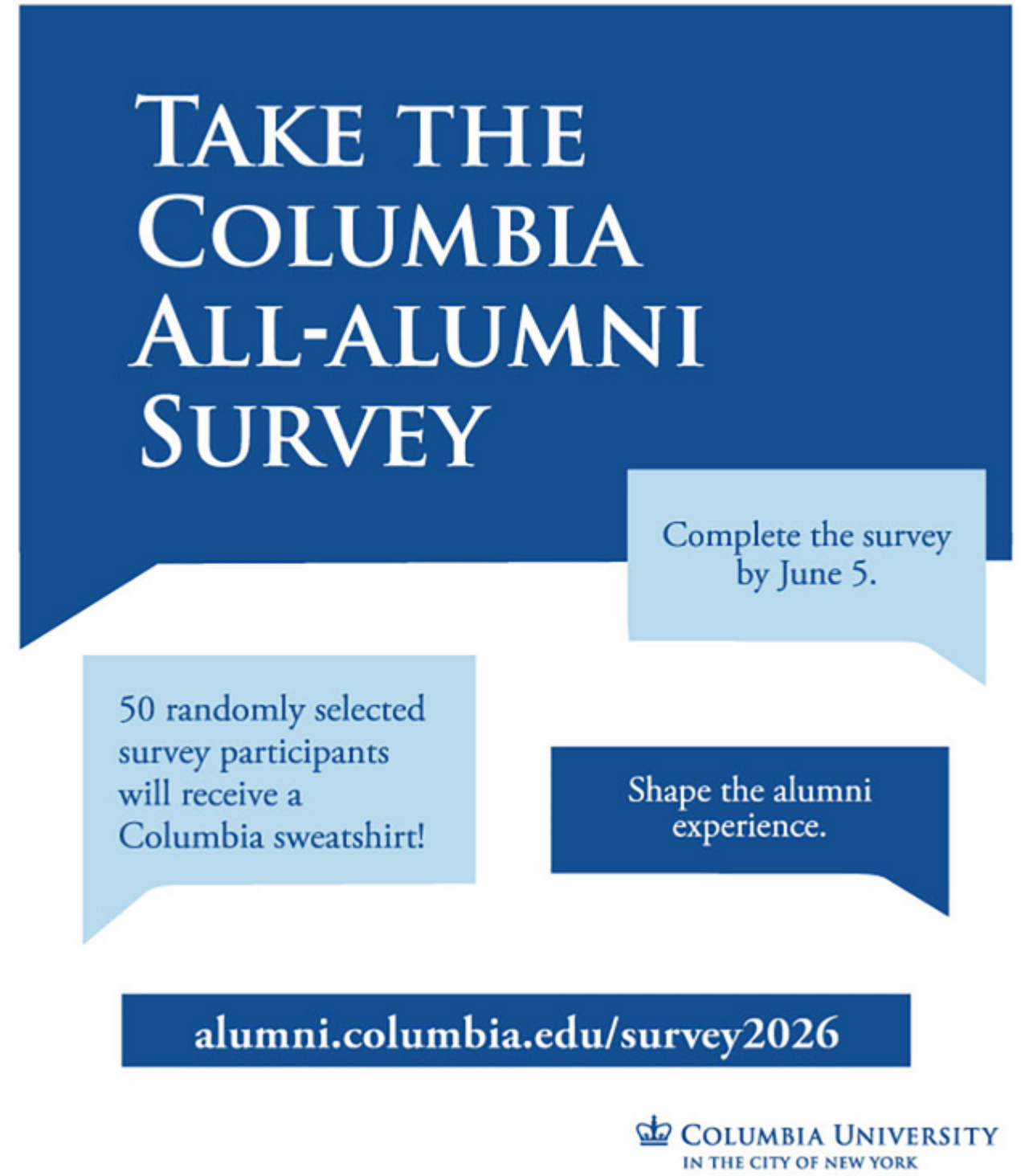
Columbia women would play a pivotal role in the 1960s movement to protest the limits on the opportunity available to them both at the University and in the society beyond. The concentration of women at Columbia also facilitated research over many decades that was then considered outside the mainstream of scholarly endeavor: research on women, families, and children, as well as interdisciplinary research on a wide variety of fields. This research created the distinctive point of view from which the modern women's movement would eventually develop, at the same time as it gave women academics fields of research in which they encountered virtually no competition from men.

When Gildersleeve began her academic career at the turn of the twentieth century, American women had barely established a toehold in higher education, and that toehold was by no means secure. By insisting that women could succeed at the very pinnacle of academic and professional life, she swam against powerful currents of public prejudice. Many parents sent their daughters to women's colleges like Barnard with the expectation that they would be sheltered from such corrupting influences as feminist ideas. But Gildersleeve did not see herself as a surrogate mother. She aspired to be a leader of a new generation of American women-women who deserved to be prepared for every opportunity that they might be able to claim.

Through her work Gildersleeve and other pioneers like her provided the essential conditions necessary to winning for women full equality with men in American society and throughout the world. In gaining for women access to Columbia medical school, she helped change the face of American, and later world, health care. In gaining for women access to Columbia Law School, she helped open the way for women's full participation in politics, a calling for which a law degree, if not essential, has nonetheless become the single most important qualification. In broadening women's scholarly horizons, Gildersleeve laid the groundwork for some of the most innovative scholarship of the twentieth century. And in helping to draft the charter of the UN, Gildersleeve assured that the issues to which she had devoted her career on Morningside Heights would be addressed throughout the world in the decades that followed. By insisting that women have the right to every educational opportunity open to men, and by fighting her whole life to secure that opportunity, she helped establish the bedrock on which feminists have been building ever since.

Read more from ***Rosalind Rosenberg***

Guide to school abbreviations



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