

# INTRODUCTION TO REMARKS FROM THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN AT COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

## *EDITOR'S NOTE*

On October 18-19, 2002, Columbia University celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first class into which, after years of pressure and debate, Columbia Law School finally admitted women. Over the course of the weekend, participants examined women's fight to gain admittance and the changing experiences of women law students and lawyers since those first few women entered in 1927. In particular, the events highlighted both the addition and acknowledgment of stellar women faculty members and the giant leap in women's enrollment that occurred in the 1970s culminating in the class entering in 2001, the first class in which women comprised more than fifty percent of the student body. Without minimizing how much work is left to do, the celebration allowed the Columbia Law School community to take a step back and appreciate how far we have come.<sup>1</sup>

The anniversary celebration began with a keynote address from the Honorable Mary Robinson, in the Fall 2003 installment of the Barbara Aronstein Black Lecture Series on Women and Law. Robinson served as the first woman president of Ireland from December 1990 through September 1997. Directly following this prestigious post, she served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights until September 2002. Since then, she has continued her efforts to expand human rights as the director of the Ethical Globalization Initiative, which works to create a more ethical globalization process by integrating human rights standards and supporting local and national human rights efforts. In her lecture, Robinson described the capacity of women to work for their own human rights, as well as the need for women to share their resources and support each other in these important struggles. Highlighting endeavors such as the Columbia Journal of Gender and Law, Robinson noted the efforts that law schools and law students have made to advance women's human rights, but emphasized the need for such privileged and resourceful institutions to develop more new ways to contribute.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of the history of women at Columbia Law School, see Whitney S. Bagnall, A Brief History of Women at Columbia Law School, at [http://www.law.columbia.edu/law\\_school/communications/reports/Fall2002?#736](http://www.law.columbia.edu/law_school/communications/reports/Fall2002?#736) (last visited July 12, 2003).

During the celebration, Barbara Aronstein Black, George Welwood Murray Professor of Legal History and Dean of the Faculty of Law (1986–91) was honored with an endowed chair in her name, the first chair named for a woman faculty member. At the lunch in her honor, Black spoke about the changes she has seen since first coming to Columbia Law School as a student—when a faculty member gave a speech to spouses of law students entitled “The Importance of a Well-Informed Law Wife (Educated, but not Equal)”<sup>2</sup>—through her time as the first woman dean of an Ivy League law school, up to the present. Crowning this event, Columbia named Carol Sanger, who joined the faculty in 1996, the first Barbara Aronstein Black Professor of Law.

The events included a series of panel discussions about topics related to women in the legal profession and women’s rights and legal concerns. We chose to publish the following panels because they contribute to the continuing debate and scholarship regarding women in the legal profession as well as the legal profession’s impact on women. The panels examine the experiences of women in relation to law, both as practitioners of law and as those who are affected by it, from the perspectives of women from diverse areas of legal practice.

Six distinguished jurists returned to Columbia to speak about their experiences in the courtroom for a panel entitled Women on the Bench. The Columbia alumnae addressed their careers and how being female affects them as judges. The panel participants were the Hon. Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Associate Justice for the U.S. Supreme Court, the Hon. Lindsey Miller-Lerman, Justice for the Nebraska Supreme Court, the Hon. Anita Bronstein Brody, Justice for U.S. District Court, and the Hon. L. Priscilla Hall and the Hon. Rena Katz Uviller, Supreme Court Justices for New York State. The Hon. Felice K. Shea, Supreme Court Justice for New York State (ret.), moderated the discussion.

Women’s Rights: Reframing the Issues for the Future explored the relationship between women’s rights, the family, and the state. The Columbia faculty and graduate panelists contribute varying perspectives to the discussion, including particular expertise in academic, legal activist, domestic, and international contexts. The panelists were Kathy Rodgers, a Columbia Law School alumna who is currently the President of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund; Ariela R. Dubler, an Associate Professor of Law at Columbia; Anika Rahman, an alumna who is the former Director of the International Program at the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy; and Jane M. Spinak, who, as the Edward Aranow Clinical Professor of Law, runs the Family Law Clinic at Columbia.

The future of women in law was considered on the panel Where Will Women Lawyers Be in 25 Years?. Moderated by Susan Sturm,

---

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Aronstein Black, Remarks from the 75th Anniversary Luncheon, 12 Colum. J. Gender & L. 313, 315 (2003).

Professor of Law at Columbia Law School, the panelists discussed the changes they have seen during their careers, where women lawyers may be in the future, and what the major challenges may be. All practitioners and Columbia Law School alumnae, the panelists were Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy; Judith Reinhardt Thoyer, a partner at Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton and Garrison; Frances E. Bivens, a partner at Davis Polk and Wardwell; and Joan Guggenheimer, general counsel at Bank One.

We edited the remarks to clarify the speakers' intended meaning without changing the content. Our alterations to the transcripts enhance readability through changes such as grammatical corrections. Speakers also had the opportunity to support or expand upon important points with footnotes. Recordings of the panels, including all presentations we published except Barbara Aronstein Black's remarks, are available at [http://www.law.columbia.edu/law\\_school/education\\_tech/streaming/video\\_4?#rtregion:main](http://www.law.columbia.edu/law_school/education_tech/streaming/video_4?#rtregion:main).