The Douglass Century

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In her 1932 message to the graduating class of the New Jersey College for Women (NJC), founding dean Mabel Smith Douglass noted:

In material things . . . the College started with nothing—that is the precise and literal truth. In things of the spirit—loyalty, friendship, encouragement, vision, faith, hope, yes, even love—we were rich. We were rich too in obstacles, in heartaches, in difficulties and troubles, and in overcoming these we built into our College a spirit of cooperation among the students, faculty, and staff, which if not unique is surely rare among colleges. NJC has been built by its students as has no other college. My earnest hope is that, as the years pass and the students of the future come and go, the old spirit of cooperation, helpfulness, and sacrifice for faith in an ideal may ever continue a living reality on this campus.¹

Faith in the ideal of women’s education continues to flourish at Douglass, renamed in 1955 to honor its founder. Douglass inaugurates its second century as a residential college for women, nested within Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. As the only women’s college in a major public research university, Douglass is home to 2,545 women students, who represent the rich demography of twenty-first-century New Jersey.² With 20.6 percent of the student population African American, 23 percent Asian
American/Pacific Islander, 19 percent Latina, 4.4 percent mixed race, and 31.2 percent white, Douglass Residential College embodies the diverse, intellectually engaged citizenry of the United States—providing an exhilarating education that is dedicated to mentoring women to lead the world with conviction, creativity, and critical insight.

Since its founding a century ago, Douglass has been in a state of perpetual transformation, incontestably living up to the “magnificent opportunity” that Mabel Smith Douglass envisioned, in which “all would have to be thought of, planned, built up, created.” As this sage innovator in women’s higher education foresaw, the making of Douglass College would not be the work of one person or one generation. The transformation of the inaugural class (fifty-four pioneering women who “extemporized in college hall . . . studying with coats on and galoshes to keep out the cold”) into a vibrant college with thirty-nine thousand alumnae and a reputation for excellence in arts, humanities, science, technology, engineering, and math, as well as women’s studies, has been the work of a century. Built through the ingenuity and persistence of ten permanent deans, eight acting/interim deans, hundreds of faculty and professional staff, and thousands of creative students with the support of the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Associate Alumnae of Douglass College (AADC), and manifold generous donors, Douglass is both a monumental achievement and an unfinished project.

To celebrate this achievement and chart the contours of this unfolding experiment in women’s higher education is the task of The Douglass Century. As the number of women’s colleges has plummeted from a high of 268 in 1960 to 38 in 2016, the very survival of a women’s college is a historic accomplishment. Within a nation still marked by gender, racial, economic, and religious inequality, the diversity of Douglass’s student population is a singular achievement—one that signals an expansion of the boundaries of belonging that has eluded most formerly all-white institutions. Over a century during which women have become the majority of undergraduate students, while college and university administrations have remained predominantly in the hands of white men, Douglass has developed and maintained a tradition of women’s leadership, while generating unparalleled knowledge production by and about women. For a century, Douglass has educated women, forging an ethos of empowerment, cultivating leadership, and nurturing individual talent, creativity, and growth, while also enabling community among women of different generations and heritages.

Whether measured in terms of longevity, scale, quality of critical engagement, depths of individual transformation, or of solidarity among students and alumnae, the significance of Douglass’s achievements becomes apparent only within a specific historical context. The project of women’s education makes sense only in relation to the historical practice of women’s exclusion—from education, the professions, public life, and the rights of citizenship. To grasp Douglass’s unique mission and the enormity of the challenges it has faced, then, it is important to consider women’s changing roles over the past hundred years, recurrent debates about the nature and legitimacy of wom-
en’s education, and the complex evolution of Rutgers from a private, religiously affiliated men’s college to a major research university.

**Women’s Roles and Women’s Education**

The first comprehensive census of occupations in the United States, which was conducted in 1870, recorded 338 occupations. Although at least one woman was noted within each of those occupational categories, 93 percent of all women workers were employed in seven jobs: domestic workers, agricultural laborers, seamstresses, milliners, teachers, textile mill workers, and laundresses. By 1920, the employment opportunities for women in New Jersey had changed only slightly. The vast majority of women continued to work as agricultural laborers, servants, clerks, saleswomen, stenographers and typists, textile workers, seamstresses, dressmakers, and teachers. The narrow sphere of women’s occupations reflected the “ideology of Republican motherhood,” which had been carefully cultivated in the early American republic, fueling the belief that “the rearing of children, that is, the laying a foundation of sound health both of body and mind in the rising generation, has justly been insisted on as the peculiar destination of women.” Whether that “peculiar destination” required or benefited from education was a topic of considerable controversy during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Some women of the Early Republic such as Abigail Adams (1744–1818), Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820), Lydia Sigourney (1791–1865), and Lydia Maria Child (1802–1880) harnessed the specific responsibilities of motherhood to an argument for women’s education, insisting that women’s access to education, the professions, and political rights would make them better mothers and more intelligent companions in marriage. Refusing cavalier denigrations of women’s intellectual abilities, proponents of women’s education suggested that any deficiency was the result of inadequate training rather than reduced aptitude.

To remedy flawed training, some women opened schools for girls. Variously called female seminaries, institutes, or academies, the schools offered languages, literature, mathematics, natural philosophy (i.e., science), and religious instruction. Although the exact number of these schools is unknown, two were operating in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the early nineteenth century. Yet these two schools took quite different approaches to women’s education. Known for genteel arts, music, French, drawing, dancing, and rote memorization, a “seminary for girls run by Miss Sophia Hay, an Englishwoman, had pupils in the first two decades of the nineteenth century from as far north as New Hampshire and as far west as Tennessee,” according to William H. Demarest’s *History of Rutgers*. By contrast, the New Brunswick Female Academy offered a more rigorous curriculum than Miss Hay’s seminary, one that included Latin, Greek, and mathematics, comparable to the curriculum at Queens College, the precursor of Rutgers, during the same period. Indeed, students from the New Brunswick Female Academy were examined by Rutgers faculty prior to graduation.
Although the boundary between secondary and tertiary education was particularly blurry in the early nineteenth century, by the 1830s several colleges began to open their doors to women. In 1831, Mississippi College became the first coeducational college in the United States to grant degrees to women, conferring the “Bachelor of Arts” on Alice Robinson and Catherine Hall. Oberlin began admitting men and women students in 1833, declaring its mission “to educate gospel ministers and pious school teachers.” Matriculating through the Female Department, forty-four women enrolled in the first class. According to its catalog, Oberlin aspired to “the elevation of female character by bringing within the reach of the misjudged and neglected sex all the instructive privileges which hitherto have unreasonably distinguished the leading sex from theirs.” Toward that end, the course of study for “young ladies” was similar to that for men: history, English literature, philosophy and the sciences, math, Latin, and Greek, although linear drawing was offered to women but not to men. Despite a shared curriculum, the education of women students was not identical to that of their male counterparts, either within or outside the classroom. Following the practice of the day to bar women from public speech, women were not allowed to speak in class or participate in public speeches or debates. At commencement, men read their essays before an admiring public, while a rhetoric professor read the women’s essays. Beyond the classroom, women were required to serve men in the dining commons, clean their rooms, and launder their clothing. Noting the sex-specific constraints imposed on women’s education, Oberlin historian Robert Fletcher suggested that the gender-specific pedagogy might have important life lessons:

It is not improbable that one reason why the early Oberlin Fathers favored “joint education” was that it was hoped that thus the young ladies could be more readily kept in their proper relation of awed subjection to the “leading sex.” Washing the men’s clothing, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but, themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin “co-eds” were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood. In early coeducational settings, then, the education of women was thoroughly compatible with continuing gender and racial subordination.

In 1839, the Rutgers Female Institute opened as the first institution of higher education for women in New York City. Although it had no ties to Rutgers College, the all-male institution in New Brunswick, it shared a key benefactor. New York real estate magnate and Revolutionary War hero Henry Rutgers (1745–1830) provided the land for the facility as a bequest. Offering an intensive one-year course of study for its first three decades, the Rutgers Female Institute was authorized by the New York Board of Regents to change its name to Rutgers Female College and begin offering the four-year bachelor of arts degree in 1867. According to the 1867–1868 Catalogue, the college
offered a “classical curriculum designed to match that of any male college in New York.” The Rutgers Female College provides a fascinating model of single-sex education designed to emulate the standard of education established for men. Yet the college catalog included an additional course for fourth-year students unlikely to be found in any male college: “Legal Relations of Women,” which provided “a general view of the legal condition and rights of both single and married women.” Beyond this innovative course in women’s rights, the Rutgers Female College also embraced sex-specific pedagogical practices, supposedly honed through years of work with women students.

Whatever may be the methods best adapted to young men, there is felt to be a wide and important difference in the case of young ladies. So delicate is the sensibility of the female mind and so serious is the evil of injuring or exciting it, that any system of individual prizes and of personal competition is felt to be deeply unhappy. It is moreover liable to unfairness, as many minor circumstances, wholly remote from the care and faithfulness of the student may exercise an important influence in determining individual rank. The whole system of medals and prizes has therefore been discarded in the institution, and the incentives to study held forth to the pupils are of a more general and more permanent character. The standing of the student is determined by a system of marks, ranging from ten for a perfect exercise to zero for a total failure. During the undergraduate years, a monthly report is furnished to the parent or guardian. . . . The grade of each alumna is not made public at commencement but is preserved in the records of the College, and may be ascertained by inspection, whenever for any important reason it is desired. In this system, all personal competitions are avoided, and no place is left for anyone to feel that, in the decisions of the College, honors have been unduly awarded or withheld.

Like many early women’s colleges, the Rutgers Female College did not publicly grade academic performance, thereby sparing its women students the ardors of competition, while providing another example of the complexities of providing an equal education for a “different” clientele.

In his 1867 presidential address to the first graduating class of Rutgers Female College, President Henry Miller Pierce offered biblical warrant for the equal education of women: “The question whether or not woman is the equal of man [was] authoritatively settled by Him [Christ], when he pronounces marriage a union as excludes the idea that there can be essential inferiority in one of the parties. His ideal of marriage, unknown alike in classical nations and to the Hebrews, is incompatible with the inequality of the sexes.” Pierce emphasized that “equality, though it excludes the idea of inferiority, is consistent with diversity.” According to the male educators who designed the curriculum for the Rutgers Female College, educational practices, which eliminate
competition, orient the woman student toward the Bible, “the only source of true wisdom,” and inculcate “true piety in woman that alone which really can draw out from the heart of man, the sentiment of lasting veneration,” foster individual happiness, preserve families, and advance civilization.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1856, the University of Iowa broke new ground, introducing publicly funded higher education for men and women. In 1862, the Morrill Act, passed by the U.S. Congress, established and financed “land grant colleges” to promote agriculture and mechanical arts. Thirty-one states moved quickly to build institutions with the land grant funds, vastly increasing the coeducational opportunities available.\textsuperscript{18} By 1873, there were nearly 100 coeducational colleges; by 1890, 282; by 1902, 330—with nearly half in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{19} At the turn of the twentieth century, 80 percent of colleges, universities, and professional schools admitted women.\textsuperscript{20} In 1870, less than half the women in higher education attended coeducational institutions. By 1890, 70 percent of women college students were in coeducational institutions.\textsuperscript{21}

As educational opportunities for women grew, however, new grounds were advanced \textit{against} women’s higher education. In the late nineteenth century, the “gender balance” in coeducational schools began to shift as more women graduated from secondary school than men. As Mabel Newcomer has documented, only 2 percent of seventeen-year-olds graduated from secondary school in the second half of the nineteenth century, but more women graduated than men, and in some years 60 percent of the graduates were women.\textsuperscript{22} As the empirical evidence made it increasingly difficult to claim that women had lesser academic abilities than men, the grounds for excluding women from higher education shifted from assertions that women \textit{could not} do the work to claims that they \textit{ought not} undertake academic pursuits—for their own well-being, for the nation, or indeed for “the race.”

As the number of women in higher education began to increase significantly, leading medical experts warned that a young woman could learn chemistry and botany as well as a young man, but she could not do so and “retain uninjured health and a future secure from neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, and other derangements of the nervous system, if she were to follow the same method that boys are trained in.”\textsuperscript{23} Harvard professor Edward H. Clarke warned that women seeking advanced education would develop “monstrous brains,” “puny bodies,” and “abnormally weak digestion.”\textsuperscript{24} According to Clarke, the human body has a finite reserve of energy. If women devote energy to academic pursuits, they divert to the brain energy necessary for development of reproductive organs. Indeed, women who indulged in extensive study were likely to suffer cessation of menstruation, failure to develop breasts, or even death from “brain degeneracy.” Recalling one patient who had suffered this fate, Clarke noted, “She was unable to make a good brain that could stand the wear and tear of life, and a good reproductive system that should serve the race, at the same time she was continually spending her force in intellectual labor. Nature asked for a periodical remission and did not get it. And so Miss ‘G’ died [because] she steadily ignored her woman’s make.”\textsuperscript{25}
Many men of Clarke’s era imagined women to be fragile creatures, and used that fragility as a reason to exclude women from various fields of study and employment. In the words of one exclusionist, “It is obvious we cannot instruct women as we do men in the science of medicine; we cannot carry them into the dissecting room and hospital; many of our delicate feelings, much of our refined sentiment must be subdued before we can study medicine; in females they must be destroyed.” To spare women the corrupting effects of men’s education, some doctors emphasized the importance of separate spheres. In *Sex in Mind and Education* (1884), Dr. William Maudsley insisted that “there is a sex in mind as distinctly as there is a sex in body.” As a consequence of each sex having unique mental characteristics, Maudsley argued that separate forms of instruction were essential. As these quotations suggest, “Most of the opposition [to women’s higher education] was less concerned with whether education was good for women, than whether educated women were acceptable to men.”

The number of women in higher education increased in coeducational institutions from 3,044 in 1875 to 19,959 in 1900 and from 9,572 to 15,977 in women’s colleges. Although the women attending colleges and universities constituted only 2.8 percent of all U.S. women aged 18 to 21, their growing numbers raised increasing concern among academic administrators as women students began to outperform as well as outnumber male students. “By 1908, women outnumbered men in seven of the large Western universities.” In a 1908 address to the American Association of University Women, M. Carey Thomas, founder and president of Bryn Mawr College, provided an impressive overview of women’s academic performance in coeducational institutions:

The evidence proves women excel in the same courses as men; the only fields they avoid are those from which they are banned (e.g., pharmacy). Women do slightly better than men in daily recitations; in spite of their supposedly less good health, they are absent less often from college classes; and, on average, they get higher marks on their examinations. None of this is very pleasing to men students, especially in the East where young men have been taught to look down on women. Men are said in consequence—and with some truth I think—to show a tendency to prefer separate colleges.

Male educators grew increasingly distraught that women were earning far more Phi Beta Kappa keys than expected. In 1901, Hugo Munsterberg, a professor of philosophy at Harvard, articulated the multiple dimensions of educated men’s fear of “feminization”:

In colleges and universities men still dominate, but soon will not if things are not changed; the great numbers of young women who pass their doctoral examinations and become specialists in science will have more and more to seek university professorships, or else they will have studied in vain. And here, as in the school, the economic conditions strongly favour the woman; since
she has no family to support, she can accept . . . [wages] so much smaller that
the man is more and more crowded from the field. And it may be clearly fore-
seen that, if other social factors do not change, women will enter as competitors
in every field where the labour does not require specifically masculine strength.
So as it has been in the factories, so in the schools, and so in a few decades, it
may be in the universities.”

The “feminization of higher education” signified not only increasing numbers of women
in colleges and universities—as faculty and students—but also the specter of falling
wages and declining prestige as “any success man attained would be devalued because
women had demonstrated equal achievement.”

Decrying the negative effects of the feminization of higher education, some univer-
sity administrators began reconsidering coeducation. At Stanford, women had been 33
percent of the entering class in 1885, and they were 51 percent within a decade. Fearing
that the university would be seen as the “Vassar of the Pacific,” Mrs. Leland Stanford
imposed a quota on women in 1899, shortly after her husband’s death. Without con-
sulting other administrators, she capped the number of women allowed to matriculate
at Stanford at five hundred at any time. Women reached that limit by 1903, creating an
unsavory unintended consequence for those concerned about feminization. Because of
the quota, the competition for admission to Stanford grew increasingly intense among
women applicants, reaching four women applicants for each admission. As a result, the
entering classes of women after 1903 outperformed their male counterparts even more
dramatically than they had before the quota was introduced.

From the moment of its founding in 1892, the University of Chicago also admitted
women and men without restriction. A decade later, President William Rainey Harper
initiated a series of discussions with the trustees about the detrimental effects of coedu-
cation, most notably the “effemination” of men, which he deemed “contrary to the best
development of the intellectual forces of the country, the unhappy fact that women
were consistently outperforming men in academics, despite their smaller number in the
student population; and the loss of certain virtues, traits, matters of deportment, and
the like, more or less distinct for either sex due to the commingling of men and women
on campus.” To remedy these “problems,” President Harper proposed the segregation
of men and women in single-sex junior colleges for the first two years of instruction.
Despite vociferous opposition from a significant portion of the faculty and Marion Tal-
bot, the dean of women, the Board of Trustees voted to segregate the junior colleges in
1902 at the urging of President Harper.

At this juncture, psychologists and education specialists once again offered “scien-
tific” grounds to legitimate concerns about coeducation and vindicate segregation of
the sexes. In 1903, noted psychologist G. Stanley Hall reported that coeducation has
detrimental effects on both sexes, causing “sexual precocity in boys—one of the sub-
tlest dangers that can befall civilization,” and “over brainwork in girls.” To avoid such
significant dangers, Hall recommended that education be reoriented to train women and men for their “separate roles in life.” In Adolescence (1904), Hall insisted that girls should be educated for roles of wife and mother: “Now that woman has by general consent attained the right to the best that man has, she must seek a training that fits her own nature as well or better. The family and the home recognize the differences of the two sexes; they are differentiated by their occupations, their games, their tastes; why do our schools exert themselves to wipe out this distinction? Neither of the sexes should be a final model for the imitation of the other.”

Noted educator Julius Sachs, who had founded the Sachs Collegiate Institute for Boys and Girls, which was known for a curriculum that integrated classics, philology, archeology, and art, began advocating sex-specific curricula after joining the faculty of Teachers College, Columbia University. In a 1907 essay, “Coeducation in the United States,” Sachs suggested that women must be trained as thoroughly as men, but in different areas: “hygiene of the home, of dress, the question of food values in the household, questions of public welfare, and above all, the entire field of esthetics that has hitherto been almost completely neglected.”

As debates about the dangers of coeducation circulated in the pages of scholarly journals, Stanford and Chicago were emulated by other private universities in the early twentieth century. The Northeast had been the slowest region in the United States to adopt coeducation. In 1872 Wesleyan admitted women students, the second institution in New England to do so, following the lead of Boston University in 1869. Tufts University, founded in 1854 as the first Universalist institution in the United States, opened its doors to women in 1890—after more than twenty years of consideration. In the early twentieth century, administrators at both Tufts and Wesleyan began to discuss the “cost” of coeducation, fearing that admission of women would deter men from attending. By 1907, women composed 70 percent of the students at Tufts, fueling trustees’ fears that the college was becoming unattractive to men. Drawing justification from the scientific discourses concerning the pitfalls of coeducation, Tufts created Jackson College as a sex-segregated unit in 1909. At Wesleyan, male students and alumni spearheaded the movement against coeducation as the number of women students increased sixfold between 1872 and 1902. As alumni lobbied the trustees, male students organized a secret society to agitate against coeducation, posted antiwomen handbills across campus, and used their numbers as a voting majority to deny women recognition at Class Day. In response to this pressure, the trustees introduced a quota in 1900, limiting women to 20 percent of those admitted. Restricting the number of women on campus did not lessen male students’ hostility to coeducation and the harassment of women students escalated. In 1909, the trustees voted to stop admitting women students, thereby ending the initial experiment with coeducation at Wesleyan with the graduation of the class of 1913.

Rather than securing academic respect, women’s outstanding performance in coeducational settings produced forms of backlash that ranged from campus harassment and
the design of special curricular offerings for women to the end of coeducation and the creation of “coordinate women’s colleges” within university settings. Harvard designated Radcliffe as its women’s “Annex” in 1882. “Harvard’s Annex provided women with lectures by Harvard’s professors but refused to certify their hard-won learning by issuing a diploma. Columbia’s Collegiate Course, in contrast, granted degrees to the women who passed a set of examinations on the prescribed syllabus Columbia men followed, but offered women no instruction or guidance on their studies.”42 In 1899, Columbia absorbed Barnard College (which had been created as a single-sex institution in 1889) as a coordinate women’s unit, creating the possibility for women to complete university course work. Brown created Pembroke as the women’s college in 1891. Although operating as sex-segregated units, the women’s colleges within these male-dominated universities offered their students the full range of academic course offerings available to male students. But the antiwomen backlash of the early twentieth century also generated a new curriculum designed for women, variously labeled “domestic science” or “home economics.”

In 1841 Catherine E. Beecher, a strong proponent of women’s education, published A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and At School, which celebrated the importance of women’s labor in the home for the stability of American democratic institutions. In contrast to early proponents of women’s education such as Fanny Wright and Harriet Martineau who made a case for equal educational opportunity, however, Beecher advanced a conception of “feminine domesticity” designed to preserve traditional gender roles among men and women, which she claimed would foster the stability and security of the new nation. By the late nineteenth century, proponents of women’s rights provided a new rationale for domestic science, advocating training in home economics “to liberate women from the hardships of housework, teach them to guard their health and safety and that of their families and to simplify their lives.”43 In a series of lectures at the University of Wisconsin, Ellen Richards identified multiple ways that domestic science could promote women’s freedom and family well-being. “Knowledge of what lurks in the dangers of food material” affords critical power to save lives. In addition, home economics can serve as a crucial component of social justice for it teaches students to “consume ethically and avoid products created under unsafe working conditions.”44 Pioneered by the University of Wisconsin’s Professor Abby Marlatt, who championed every facet of “home management” as a science, home economics was considered one of the most rigorous courses at the UW campus in the early twentieth century. The curriculum included chemistry; physiology; bacteriology; linguistic training in English and a foreign language; technical topics on food, textiles, architecture; and household management. As early as 1911, Professor Marlatt introduced the “Practice Cottage” to subject every aspect of housework to constant study. She incorporated scientific management theories (Taylorism) in domestic science education, using the Practice Cottage as a technical tool to teach scientific management and time efficiency in the discipline of home economics. Imparting a “scientific approach” to the education of
women as professionals, both as homemakers and as career women, the courses equipped graduates to become research chemists, nutritionists, bacteriologists, and government employees, as well as college and high school teachers of home economics.\textsuperscript{45}

Although feminist proponents of home economics sought to develop an interdisciplinary field of study that could provide meaningful career education for women, university administrators concerned with the “dangers” of coeducation latched on to “domestic science” as a vehicle for the redomestication of university women. Following the University of Chicago, University of Wisconsin president Charles R. Van Hise decided to segregate the student body, establishing separate classes for women and men. President Van Hise insisted that segregating the women was imperative in ensuring that the rapid increase of women at universities would not “feminize” the men or drive the men from the fields in which women were heavily enrolled. He also suggested that sex segregation was important because men students were objecting to the attendance of women. In addition, claiming that male reason was more theoretical in nature, Van Hise argued that there was a need to devise “a peculiar education for a woman.” Home economics fit his conception of this peculiar education perfectly.\textsuperscript{46} Not content to allow women to elect their own course of study, male university administrators lobbied the federal government for legislation to encourage separate educational courses for women. In 1917, Congress passed the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act as a supplement to the 1862 Morrill Act, which created the land grant colleges. Smith-Hughes not only appropriated federal money to state universities and state-aided colleges for teaching agricultural trades and home economics; it legally mandated land grant colleges to finance at least one full four-year collegiate course for women—a teacher training course in home economics.\textsuperscript{47}

The attacks on and retrenchment from coeducation encountered spirited opposition from proponents of coeducation and from advocates of women’s colleges. Noted American philosopher John Dewey denounced the attacks on coeducation as antidemocratic, suggesting that any retreat from merit-based education for women and men would give rise to “an undesirable spirit of aristocracy . . . attracting a class of students more interested in social diversion, and with the wealth necessary to indulge in it rather than those of a disposition to serious work.”\textsuperscript{48} President William Oxley Thompson of Ohio State University lampooned the specious fears fueling attacks on coeducation:

The Chicago boys that desire to be vaccinated so they cannot take the girls, or to be educated in quarantine, will not be disturbed by the rest of the world. On the other hand, if there are boys who are not afraid of being “feminized” and who have the necessary courage, let us by all means retain institutions where they may face ruin at the hands of the weaker sex. . . . The girls have been taking too many prizes in the college classes and we are told that the boys conscious of their “ultimate superiority” feel discouraged over the condition in the first few years of the contest.\textsuperscript{49}
Advocates of women’s colleges also denounced the rampant misogyny circulating in the attacks on coeducation. In 1901, Smith College professor Elizabeth Deering Hanscom published a thoughtful critique of flawed notions of sex-specific virtues and calls for gender-differentiated curricula. “To avoid then,” she wrote, “the debilitating sense of the moral inferiority and the deadening arrogance of moral superiority founded on assumptions of difference in sex, educational institutions require a more general view of virtue and the virtues.” Hanscom had no doubt that issues of domination and subordination lay at the heart of attacks on women’s education and on the call for sex-specific courses of study. M. Carey Thomas also published widely about the dangers of “recent efforts to press women’s colleges to develop special curriculum in domestic science, hygiene, sanitary drainage, child study—practical studies for married women.” According to Thomas, “the argument that women’s colleges should fit women for two great vocations, marriage and teaching/ training of children is specious. Nothing more disastrous for the training of women, or for men, can be conceived of than this specialized education for women as a sex. . . . It will unfit women to teach boys, including their own sons and will lead to women being dismissed from the classroom.”

The Quest for Women’s Higher Education in New Jersey: The Move toward NJC

New Jersey was “the last state in the union to open the way of higher education to women,” and it trailed behind other states in provision of public education at all levels. Although the largest growth in women’s enrollments by far occurred in state universities, New Jersey took no action to facilitate women’s access to college education. Under the auspices of funding from the 1862 Morrill Act, the New Jersey Assembly designated Rutgers the state agricultural school in 1864, and by 1890, federal funding for scientific and agricultural facilities covered 60 percent of Rutgers’s budget. In 1881, Professor George H. Cook, the first layperson to serve on the Rutgers faculty and the director of the “Scientific School” and the agricultural field station, and his colleague David Murray recommended that Rutgers admit women. Keenly aware of coeducational developments at other land grant institutions, they proposed that “young women of proper age and fitness” be admitted to the college to pursue a new course. The course was designed for students “who found the program of the Scientific School too specialized, but who did not wish to devote so much time to the classics and mathematics as was required in the classical course. By requiring only two years of Latin and two years of math, the ‘Third Course’ permitted more work in modern languages, social sciences, and philosophy.” Cook and Murray pointed out that in the numerous institutions that “had recently accepted coeducation, the experience indicated an elevation of standards of scholarship and deportment. . . . Nor ought it to be overlooked that there is everywhere among thoughtful people a growing conviction of the importance of providing for young women equally with young men, largely
increased facilities for acquiring Higher Education.”

Although the trustees approved the establishment of the “Third Course,” they rejected the proposal for coeducation without any explanation.

As Rutgers president William H. Demarest noted in his History of Rutgers College, in 1891, “the admission of women to the college became again a subject of discussion ten years after its former discussion and rejection. An overture was even received from the Rutgers Female College in New York, which later went out of existence, proposing that it be brought into connection. Again all such proposal [sic] was rejected. The Trustees and the college body were positively opposed to coeducation.”

— 1913 PAMPHLET SOLICITING SUPPORT FOR A WOMEN’S COLLEGE IN NEW JERSEY

[Image]
In 1911 when the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs determined to take up the cause of women’s higher education, they did not do so naively.\(^{57}\) They were thoroughly familiar with the history of Rutgers and the anti-coeducation sentiment that pervaded the institution, just as they were keenly aware of the anti-coeducation backlash that was fueling the creation of “coordinate colleges for women” housed within larger universities. Yet they were also cognizant of the fact that New Jersey high schools were graduating 1.5 times the number of girls as boys and faced a severe shortage of women teachers.\(^{58}\) New Jersey women lacked access to nonsectarian higher education where they could acquire credentials to teach in secondary schools. In the first decade of the century, the Roman Catholic College of St. Elizabeth, founded in 1899, was graduating four to five women a year. Mount Saint Mary College (later renamed Georgian Court), opened as a liberal arts school for women in 1908. Anti-Catholic sentiment, rife in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, made these options unacceptable to many Protestant families. Rutgers College considered itself a private men’s school, religiously affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church, yet it also housed the “agricultural department,” which as the land grant college for New Jersey, received both federal and state funds. Women could not matriculate in any degree-granting programs at Rutgers, but beginning in 1907, some women were allowed to participate in agricultural extension programs and summer institutes organized by the agriculture department. The College Club of Jersey City began raising funds for scholarships to send young women out of state for their education, but the number of scholarships they could fund did not compare with the seventy full-tuition scholarships that the state provided to deserving students to attend Rutgers.\(^{59}\) Denied access to state-funded scholarships at Rutgers, and denied access to federally funded public education at Rutgers Agricultural Department, the land grant institution, the women of New Jersey faced a double dose of state-sponsored discrimination. Spurred on by such exclusionary practices, the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs launched a campaign to create the New Jersey College for Women (NJC).

Under the talented leadership of Mabel Smith Douglass, proponents of NJC realized that an endowment for a totally independent women’s college with private funds was not feasible financially. And they surmised that Rutgers trustees and President Demarest would never relent in their opposition to coeducation. To craft a viable strategy, they turned to the model of a “coordinate women’s college,” which had been successfully adopted by Barnard, Delaware, Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina.\(^{60}\) Mabel Smith Douglass was a shrewd tactician. In an arena in which men held final decision power over the fate of the proposed college, she knew she would gain nothing by appearing to threaten either state legislators or Rutgers trustees. For this reason, she urged Women’s Club activists to assure the Trustees that they had no interest in coeducation, which “fostered ‘unpleasant’ social relations, a source of distraction to both professors and students, and led to unhealthy competition between the sexes.”\(^{61}\) Douglass wrote personally to President Demarest to insist that “as to co-education—I would
not worry about that—no one wants it, neither the parents of the girls nor the parents of the boys . . . I know that I would lose some of my best backers were I to propose coeducation.”

To assuage fears further, the campaign for NJC avoided all militancy, adopting “a gentle feminine tone.” Indeed, Douglass asked campaigners not to mention suffrage while rallying support for the college.

Framing the college in nonthreatening vocational language, pro-NJC forces blanketed the state, detailing the need for proper vocational training for New Jersey women, for “a technical college for women” that could offer young women the opportunity to prepare themselves for diverse careers—“librarian, secretarial, nursing, domestic science, art, physical training, and social and civic betterment.” Borrowing language from the debates about “domestic science,” they suggested that graduates would be suited not only for “exciting new positions as court stenographers, and private secretaries” but
also as managers of homes and institutions, inspectors of food supplies, expert buyers of fabrics, designers, assistants in research work, students of home economics and homemakers, caretakers of children and trained workers in charity.\textsuperscript{64} 

In advancing the campaign for NJC, Women’s Club activists had to think carefully about how they addressed the issue of women’s citizenship. In the final decades before the passage of the Woman’s Suffrage Amendment, enacted by the U.S. Congress in June 1919 and ratified by three-quarters of the states by August 1920, women’s citizenship remained a hotly contested issue. Neither the membership of the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs nor the population of New Jersey was firmly pro-suffrage. Indeed, in October 1915, New Jersey voters defeated a referendum on women’s suffrage by a 58 percent majority.\textsuperscript{65} In this complex political environment, proponents of NJC adopted the rhetoric of republican motherhood, arguing that a “good general education . . . would suit women to be an efficient housekeeper . . . both a citizen and homemaker . . . for both of these major functions the times require the most extended education possible.”\textsuperscript{66} In this early twentieth-century context, a racial element was added to the conceptualization of republican motherhood. “Women of the state were urged to join the movement behind NJC in the interests of “their daughters and their race.” Appeals for money and support were addressed to “every woman who realizes that in the little girl we have the potential mother of the race, and that the level to which the future of the race will attain depends upon the same little girl.”\textsuperscript{67}

As Patricia Palmieri has noted, the “Progressive era is typically associated with women’s entrance to the professions of medicine, law, social work, and academe, but it was also a period of reaction—backlash against women’s colleges. . . . Many male educators and doctors viewed women’s colleges as ‘institutions for the promotion of celibacy, producing a class of intellectual women who were not marrying and hence were committing ‘race suicide.’”\textsuperscript{68} Marriage rates for women college graduates were low (55 percent compared with 90 percent for the general population). Although proponents of women’s rights linked these marriage rates to laws that prohibited married women from many occupations, thereby creating an unnecessary opposition between a career and family life, those opposed to women’s higher education lamented “the decline of feminine charm and the rise of the mannish woman.”\textsuperscript{69} Alice Freeman Palmer (1855–1902), a graduate of the University of Michigan, president of Wellesley College, and later the first dean of women at the University of Chicago, pointed out that “it is not possible to annihilate the womanliness of our American girls by anything that you can do to them in education.”\textsuperscript{70} But her lucid arguments did not persuade opponents of women’s education. In a 1905 speech to Congress, “President Theodore Roosevelt condemned low marriage rates and the equally scandalous practice of birth control. He popularized the term, ‘race suicide,’ insisting that the incapacity or unwillingness of the Anglo-Saxon race and particularly its highly educated members to marry and reproduce . . . would leave the nation in the hands of immigrants . . . whose fertility was quite high, but whose intellect was deemed inferior.”\textsuperscript{71}
Avoiding controversial issues like suffrage, proponents of NJC canvassed the state to build public sentiment and raise funds in support of the women’s college. The campaign emphasized that NJC would train women “to be better citizens, better homemakers, and better club-women.” . . . The early literature clearly set out the college’s mission to meet the needs of just two groups of women: “those who have to earn their living by teaching or some kind of clerical work, and those who wish to have a good education together with a training that will fit them to be efficient housekeepers.” Women’s true vocation, motherhood, was celebrated in all the literature: the purpose of NJC was to prepare its students to be better mothers.  

Carrying this message to influential forces across the state, the campaign built a coalition of women’s groups that extended well beyond the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs, including “the D.R.s [National Society of the Daughters of the Revolution of 1776], the D.A.R.s [Daughters of the American Revolution], the Suffrage, the Anti-Suffrage, the Colonial Dames, the WCTUs [Women’s Christian Temperance Union].”  

As George Schmidt recounts in his history of Douglass College, the Rutgers trustees were cajoled into supporting the coordinate women’s college, “provided such an institution could raise its own funds and would not expect Rutgers to assume any financial obligations.” Savvy friends of Rutgers suggested that verbal endorsement without any commitment of financial support would seal the fate of the proposed college. Offering advice to President Demarest, U.S. senator and Rutgers trustee Joseph Frelinghuysen referred to Mabel Smith Douglass as “reasonable and intelligent. . . . She wants $100,000. . . . I think the thing should not be turned down or ignored, as her inability to raise her fund will be a sufficient deterrent without any opposition on our part, and if it could succeed, it would not be so bad as it would not be a coeducational college but an affiliated college.” In 1914, after three years of the federation’s statewide campaigning, the Rutgers trustees went on record in favor of an affiliated women’s college. 

Senator Frelinghuysen clearly underestimated Mabel Smith Douglass. She proved to be a particularly gifted fund-raiser. Orchestrating a door-to-door fund-raising effort, she asked each household to donate one dollar for women’s education. She persuaded James Neilson to donate large tracts of land as a site for NJC and Leonor Loree to provide $50,000 to grade the land to create an athletic field for the students. She negotiated a gift of property—the former home of Rutgers professor Jacob Cooper—from his son Drury W. Cooper on the condition that she could raise $23,500 in matching funds from the women of New Brunswick, a task she accomplished by 1918. She also succeeded in borrowing $50,000 from the Rutgers trustees to purchase the Carpender estate adjacent to the Cooper residence (a loan subsequently repaid by James Neilson through a gift of land to Rutgers College). Douglass also convinced the New Jersey State Legislature to appropriate $50,000 per year for the maintenance of NJC, a sum that increased
significantly each year after the college opened. With these financial matters in place, the trustees passed a resolution in spring 1918 to “establish a Woman’s College as a department of the State University of New Jersey maintained by the Trustees.” With the official approval of NJC on the books, Douglass also secured a commitment for a $1.6 million bequest from Elizabeth Rodman Voorhees to build a chapel for the new college, a sum that surpassed all the funds raised by President Demarest and the Rutgers trustees in their 150th-anniversary campaign.

Women’s Education at NJC
As the product of a diverse coalition of interests, NJC harbored multiple and conflicting hopes for women’s education. While some assumed that women would now have access to the same educational opportunities as men at Rutgers College, others aspired to shape an education attuned to particular conceptions of women’s “sacred mission”: marriage and motherhood. Although Mabel Smith Douglass and the faculty were com-

▲ PAGE FROM MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS’S LEDGER RECORDING DONATIONS TO THE FUND TO CREATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, 1913
mitted to liberal arts education, “emphasizing the importance of being intellectually alive, saturating oneself with literature, philosophy, and the social sciences, before deciding irrevocably on a career,” the curriculum included English composition and literature, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, history, chemistry, biology, and mathematics, as well as “teacher education, and home economics—the bread and butter course in more ways than one.”

Supporters of the college disagreed not only about the content of the curriculum but also about the very nature of the college. The women in the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs, who had fought for its creation, envisioned NJC as a “coordinate college” for women, equal in rank and importance to the “men’s colleges” (Arts and Sciences, Agriculture, and Engineering) at Rutgers. Presaging the college’s complicated relationship with Rutgers, President Demarest and the trustees “thought of it as a department of the Agricultural College, the recipient of Smith-Hughes Funds.” Supported by public taxation, the New Jersey Assembly conceived the college as nonsectarian, yet like their male counterparts at Rutgers College, the entering NJC students were required to attend chapel three times each week, including attending one weekly service that had a distinctly Protestant flair. As a recipient of federal funds under the Smith-Hughes Act, NJC was prohibited from any form of racial discrimination; however, it remained an almost exclusively white institution until the 1970s, although it experimented with national, religious, and ethnic diversity, opening its doors to a student from India in 1922, two Orthodox Jews in 1925, and a Puerto Rican student in 1926.

From this welter of possibilities, life commenced at the New Jersey College for Women in the fall of 1918. The Douglass Century explores the vision of women’s education devised by Mabel Smith Douglass and her colleagues in the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs and how it has been transformed through one hundred years of ingenuity and growth. From the outset, the hybrid nature of the college was distinctive. It struggled for autonomy, yet it operated under complicated constraints. It was a “department” of Rutgers with a governance structure created by Rutgers trustees, who nonetheless frequently complained of the “peculiar independence” of NJC. Rutgers trustee Leonor F. Loree, a railroad magnate, adopted NJC as a favorite cause, serving on the Board of Managers until his death in 1940. Loree insisted that NJC be run like a business, giving priority to developing its infrastructure and cutting costs in order to run a surplus, a strategy that evoked the ire of Rutgers president John Thomas, who criticized the women’s college for its “overemphasis on physical expansion at the cost of academic excellence and administrative efficiency, accusing it of hiring cheap labor.” In addition to the Rutgers administration and the NJC board, Mabel Smith Douglass had to deal with the politics of the New Jersey legislature, which since the 1860s had been embroiled in fraught exchanges with Rutgers over questions of accountability. With its own line item in the New Jersey budget appropriation, NJC developed intricate relations with state legislators—relations that were also a source of dismay to
the Rutgers administration. Indeed, it was the report of the Duffield Commission, which was appointed in 1928 by the State Assembly to investigate all aspects of Rutgers’s relation to the state that first officially designated NJC an autonomous college, one of the “coordinate and constituent colleges of the University.”

Juggling the often competing demands of an activist board, a suspicious administration, and a thoroughly political state legislature, Mabel Smith Douglass recruited faculty and students and launched the project of women’s higher education. Between 1918 and 1929, student enrollment increased from 54 to 1,159. By 1929, there were 1,401 men at Rutgers and 1,159 women at NJC, and Dean Douglass boasted that in both 1928 and 1929, Douglass graduated more seniors than did Rutgers. The state appropriation for NJC increased from $50,000 to $430,000 in its first decade, and the faculty increased from sixteen to eighty. With these resources in play, the arduous work of building and sustaining a women’s college commenced.

Douglass historian George P. Schmidt noted that from its inception NJC was not “just another college.” In contrast to coeducational institutions that sought to assimilate
women into norms derived from men’s academic experiences, NJC took women’s education as its fundamental mission, opening itself to the possibility that a women’s college “should also involve changes in the content of the curriculum, what is taught, and the varieties of human experience examined. It might also affect the very creation of knowledge because a new group with new social perspectives would be recruited to research activities of the universities which are today the major creators of knowledge . . . [and it should promote] equal treatment for males and females [including] the same pattern of career development for men and women into the professional elites of society.”

The following chapters analyze the conception of women’s education that evolved at NJC, a unique blend of curricular and co-curricular offerings devised to prepare women for life and for leadership. The challenges confronting a women’s college have changed since 1918 as the roles of women, the nature of the world, and Rutgers University have been dramatically transformed. Enfranchisement, Prohibition, the Great Depression, World War II, the civil rights movement, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Vietnam War, the women’s movement, access to contraception, affirmative action, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, Roe v. Wade (1973), the sexual revolution, the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act, the Internet, the Beijing Platform for Action, gay marriage—all have left their mark just as have diminished state funding, the Rutgers Federated College Plan, coeducation, the 1981 University Reorganization, and the 2005 Transformation of Undergraduate Education. The Douglass Century traces the intricate means by which the college has preserved and enhanced its mission under these changing circumstances. Drawing upon its unswerving commitment to women’s education, cherished values and traditions, loyal alumnae, astute administrators, and outstanding students as well as the support of a growing research university and of friends in the state legislature, Douglass has become a leader in women’s higher education in the twenty-first century. The following chapters document that transformation.