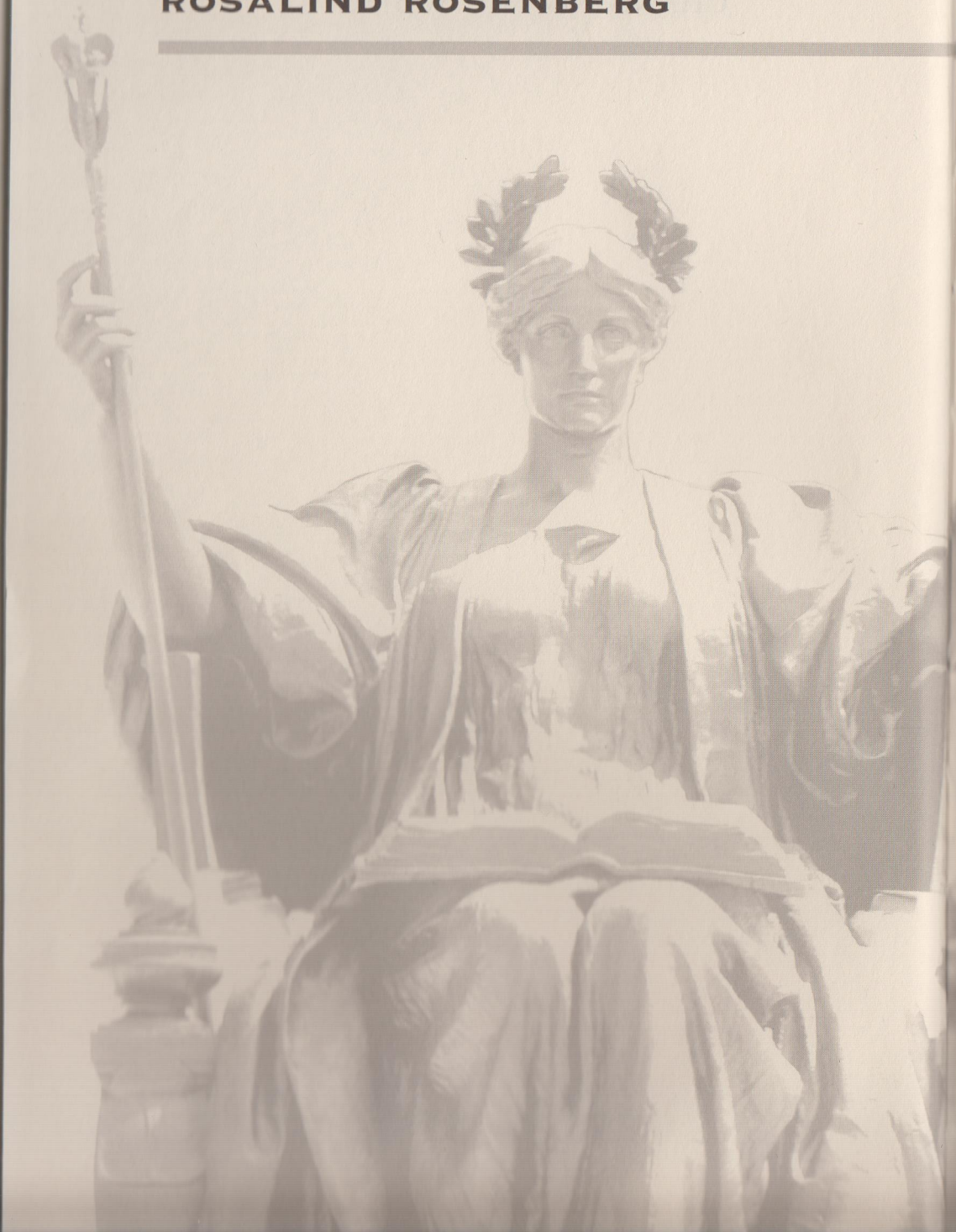
ROSALIND ROSENBERG



CHANGING THE SUBJECT

HOW THE WOMEN OF COLUMBIA SHAPED THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT SEX AND POLITICS

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makes us all occasionally uncomfortable. I see no other way."[102] According to one of his associates, McGill felt "blind-sided" by the government's charge of discrimination and "didn't give a damn about affirmative action." But he had to do something to keep Pottinger from making good on his threat to cancel government contracts. He turned therefore to his vice president for administration, Paul Carter, and gave him thirty days to solve the university's problems with the government.[103]

Four days later, the University Senate, formed in April 1969 in response to the student protests of 1968, created the Commission on the Status of Women. In one of its first meetings, the commission, co-chaired by Frances Hoffman, director of chemical laboratories at Columbia, and Ivar Berg of the Business School, condemned the administration for appearing to be more concerned with restoring contracts than with ending discrimination. The committee urged the administration to abandon its "isolationist" attitude and called on McGill to "seek active participation of concerned groups."[104]

In two gestures born of long experience, McGill met with members of Columbia Women's Liberation and formed an advisory board on which he asked some of the university's most respected female faculty to serve.[105] Unlike many men of his generation who had difficulty dealing with women outside a domestic role, McGill had been accustomed to the concept of the working woman from early childhood. His mother was a nurse; one of his sisters, a telephone operator. A female professor at Fordham, Dorothea McCarthy, had been the faculty member who first inspired him to study psychology. His wife, a nurse like his mother, had worked the evening shift at a nearby hospital when he was in graduate school, leaving their young daughter in his care every day at 4:00 P.M. And while there were as yet few women in his field when he came to Columbia as a psychologist in the 1950s, Rose Edith Sitgreaves, a statistician at Teachers College, became one of his collaborators. However, McGill never appointed a woman to a senior administrative position. Indeed, he allowed Marion Jemmott, who had worked her way up through the ranks from secretary of the philosophy department to "acting" secretary of the university, to languish in that position for seven years before granting her a regular appointment shortly before he left Columbia.[106] Moreover, he had a low opinion of feminists, as he once confided to Marjorie Hope Nicolson.[107] But when forced to confront injustice, he had the political savvy to reach out for help in addressing it.[108]

Reaching out to faculty from across the university, McGill tried to achieve ethnic and racial as well as gender balance on his twelve-member Faculty Affirmative Action Advisory Committee. He named five women: Patricia Graham, from Teachers College and Barnard; Frances Hoffman, director of the chemical laboratories at Columbia; Chien-Shiung Wu, professor of physics at Columbia; Nina Garsoian, professor of history and a member of the Middle East Institute; and Ann Hirsch, assistant dean of the graduate faculties. The women were joined by seven men: Eli Ginzberg from the Business School; Jonathan Cole from the sociology department at Barnard; Charles Hamilton, the committee's only black member, from the Columbia political science department; Herbert Robbins, a statistician from the Columbia math department; Ichiro I. Shirato from the department of Asian languages and cultures; Gerald Thompson from the medical school, and Robert Brookhart, associate provost. McGill asked for their advice in setting goals and developing programs to reach them.[109] Patricia Graham taught history and education at Barnard and Teachers College and had published in *Science* in September 1970 the article "Women in Academe," a detailed analysis of the discrimination women faced in the academy.[110] Graham came from an academic family. Her maternal grandfather was a classicist; her uncle, a president of the University of Oregon; and her mother, Marguerite Hall Albjerg, a historian with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, who gave up a full-time appointment when she married and taught only occasional courses in history and government at Purdue University, where her husband had a regular appointment. Prevailing nepotism rules precluded her from ever securing a professorial position, despite her publication of four books and more than thirty articles on history and education. Graham and her husband, Loren Graham, who was a professor of Russian history at Columbia, resolved that theirs would be a different academic partnership, one in which the wife would not have to sacrifice her ambition to the fulfillment of her husband's career. The balkanized structure of Columbia University, where the separate existence of Barnard and Teachers College offered opportunities to a number of Columbia faculty wives, made that goal possible.[111]

More than most men on the faculty, Loren Graham understood the pressures faced by women who sought to succeed within academe. At about the time the advisory committee was formed, the women graduate students in history called a meeting of the faculty in the same Fayerweather lounge in which CWL had first met. As Estelle Freedman later remembered the event, each woman had written out a "horror story" on a note card. The students had shuffled them, and then the "women read the stories anonymously, not of their own experience but from someone else in the department." One reported an experience on the first day of graduate school in which a professor had defended Columbia's continuing use of the M.A. degree, when other universities were beginning to phase the degree out, on the

grounds that it was useful to the many women who would leave graduate school after the first year or two. Another described learning of a letter of recommendation that said she was not mobile because she was married. "At the end of the exposition, most faculty who spoke seemed shocked and disbelieved that any of these things could have happened in their department, which they assured us held no biases against women," Freedman recalled.

> But then one ally spoke out, the Russian historian Loren Graham, who basically described the emperor's clothes. He recalled having been a graduate student in the department along with his wife, Patricia Graham, and then he compared the treatment he got with hers. That silenced the group, and I like to think that in the end we raised some consciousness. But, I note, only after a male faculty member broke ranks.[112]

In 1973/1974, the history department conducted searches that resulted in the hiring of three female assistant professors, two in European and one in American history. At the same time, Columbia adopted its first code of academic freedom, which included a section devoted to faculty parents. Any faculty member who was the principal caretaker of a child under the age of nine would have the option of teaching half time and slowing his or her tenure clock by half. With promotions to tenure largely frozen, this new policy had little immediate effect. But its appearance in the university's code represented an important first step toward taking account of the pressures that young parents, and especially mothers, faced as they sought to pursue academic careers. Patricia and Loren Graham played a critical role in bringing this change.

The chemist Frances Hoffman emphasized the problem of salary disparities. "We made a short list of the egregious examples of the women professors whose salaries needed adjustment," Hoffman recalled. McGill "put it into his pocket and said he would take care of it. He did; people got raises." Chien-Shiung Wu was one of those affected.[113] "What came out of this ad hoc committee was wonderful," Hoffman later recalled. "These women, who had all been scattered throughout the university, met in the presidents' office and became good friends. We got along so well. Wu had a beautiful home on Claremont Ave. She got women together so that they would know each other. She invited every woman at Columbia."[114]

The physicist Chien-Shiung Wu had come to feminism gradually, but with increasing emotion, over the course of the 1960s. Attending a conference on women in science and engineering at MIT in 1964 with, among others, Alice Rossi, she had listened in stunned disbelief to the comments of

the psychoanalyst Bruno Bettleheim about the nature of women's contributions in science. Speaking of a young Russian woman, he said, "She loved her work with a womanly embracing of her tasks rather than a masculine conquering of them." He went on to say that a woman's point of view might be productive in some fields of education and the social sciences but not in physics or mathematics, where one strives for objectivity. "I doubt that the tiny atoms and nuclei or the mathematical symbols of the DNA molecules have any preference for either masculine or feminine treatment," Wu indignantly responded. Alice Rossi, in a lengthy address, blamed attitudes like those voiced by Bettlelheim—and widely shared in America—for women's low numbers in science. Everyone expected women to drop out, felt more comfortable when they did, and even encouraged them to do so. Following that conference, Wu became an increasingly active participant in discussions about women's place in science. As she told a meeting of the American Physics Society in February 1971, no one reading about the "recent women's liberation developments" could fail to see the "urgent needs of upgrading the woman's position in the academic profession." She set forth to do so by her participation on McGill's advisory committee.[115]

Another committee member, Eli Ginzberg, agreed that the need for change was obvious. He thought, moreover, that the university, as well as its women, would benefit from it. In a memorandum to President McGill, written two weeks after the Pottinger bombshell, Ginzberg urged that the university turn the government's intervention to the university's advantage. For too long the administration had allowed departments to operate without adequate supervision. As a consequence, "too many mediocre people have received tenure," there has been no effort "to improve the staffing in weak departments," it has been difficult to arrange joint appointments, and there is "duplication of staff teaching similar subjects in different divisions of the University with suboptimal numbers of students." Ginzberg conceded that compliance with the government could be both costly and destructive of academic standards, "but this need not happen." Indeed, he argued that the government was handing the administration the means to build a much better, more diverse, and higher quality institution.[116]

The sociologist Jonathan Cole agreed. A protégé of Robert Merton, Cole was an assistant professor at Barnard College at the time the committee was formed. McGill recruited him because of his skills in social-scientific data analysis, which he had developed while working on his dissertation on social stratification in the sciences. It fell largely to him, "working 24/7" as he later recalled, to amass the data without which no affirmative-action plan could exist. Raised in Queens, and a product of New York City's public