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Christian Teachers to Self-Help Girls: Re-Imagining Women on Financial Aid at Wellesley College, 1878-1927

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Christian Teachers to Self-Help Girls:

Re-Imagining Women on Financial Aid at Wellesley College, 1878-1927

Katherine Waite Cali

Advisor Brenna Greer

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Prerequisite for Honors

in History

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Katherine W. Cali

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April 22, 2013
Wellesley College

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INTRODUCTION

Sed Ministrare: Wellesley Re-imagines Womanhood, 1875



Fig. 1. The College Hall Chapel, 1875-1914, had prized stained-glass windows, a gift from a donor, that depict a young woman in contemporary costume praying before Jesus. Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery.

One morning in the autumn of 1875, Wellesley College's first student body and its original twenty-eight all-female faculty members filed into the Chapel for mandatory Sunday services.¹ Wellesley, which had opened its doors to students only a couple of months before, was one of only a handful of U.S. institutions that offered full college degrees to women and, as the third-eldest of the Seven Sisters, one of even fewer women's colleges. The first-semester students gathered in the Chapel would one day be among the only two percent of women in their generation who would graduate from college.² The first Wellesley students understood how much having chosen to seek higher education set them apart from their peers. Their Arcadian surroundings in the wooded hills, sunny meadows, and birch groves of a peaceful lakeside estate near West Needham, a suburb of Boston, must have only increased their sense of separation from the world outside their new alma mater.

In those days, the vast, extravagant College Hall housed all students and faculty and nearly every indoor space on campus, including the Chapel, on an imposing hill overlooking Lake Waban. With its sunny atriums, marble statues, and exotic potted plants, most of College Hall resembled a luxury hotel more than a university. By comparison, the Chapel itself had an austere grace that expressed great seriousness of purpose (Fig. 1). The sacred space possessed soaring ceilings ornamented with black walnut trusses, high windows, and two pieces of exquisite Munich stained glass donated by former Massachusetts governor William Claflin, a reformer sympathetic to women's rights. The Chapel was one of the largest single spaces at the College, suggesting its central symbolic importance if not the actual practical demand on its

capacity: on this particular Sunday, the women in attendance filled fewer than half of the Chapel's 750 seats.³

The women sat reverently as College founder Henry Fowle Durant, dressed as always in all black, mounted the pulpit. A formidable Harvard-educated haute-bourgeoisie lawyer who turned evangelical Congregationalist preacher after the death of his only child, Durant brought rhetorical skill, charisma, and a convert's zeal to his sermons. Although he had no formal theological training, contemporary accounts paint him as transfixing. Recalled one churchgoer who saw him preach:

His face in repose was a benediction; it would have made a study for an artist who decided to paint a portrait of the apostle John. His waving white hair environed it like a nimbus. But his eyes could flash fire...[He] argued the Gospel...with the same vehemence with which he had carried a conviction in the courtroom, and always succeeded in getting a verdict... No audience ever went to sleep under his preaching.⁴

Gathered together in the lofty space of the Chapel, the first 342 Wellesley women listened as Durant drew on the full range of his oratorical powers to convey to them his vision of the purpose of educating women and, by extension, the purpose of educated women—*their* purpose. Florence Morse Kingsley, who arrived at Wellesley a year later and perhaps heard about the famous event from the class above her, noted that Durant's sermon resonated far beyond that its original audience.⁵ He had titled it "The Spirit of the College," and according Converse, after its delivery, "neither students nor faculty were...left with any uncertainty as to the aspirations—nay, more, the firm conviction—upon which Wellesley was founded."⁶

That Sunday, Durant spoke with the martial words of a revolutionary as much as a preacher—in other words, as a prophet. He explained to his flock the significance of their unusual choice to attend his College, casting it as inherently revolutionary act that

could not help but unsettle society – for the better. He asked teachers and students alike for their cooperation in what he described as “the revolt which is the real meaning of Women’s Higher Education.” That revolt, he explained, was against oppressive gender norms, “the slavery in which women are held by the customs of society – the broken health, the aimless lives, the subordinate position, the helpless dependence, the dishonesties and shams of so-called education.” Because of its opposition to women’s literal and psychological confinement to home and hearth, women’s higher education, Durant preached, “is one of the great world battle-cries for freedom; for right against might.” Durant cast his listeners as an army of righteous rebels, not merely individual students pursuing education in hopes of achieving personal goals. Their shared cause, Durant told the women before him, was in “opposition to the customs and prejudices of the public, and therefore they must be “in the noblest sense, reformers.” In effect, they had volunteered for the front lines for one of the world’s “great revolutions” by coming to Wellesley.⁷

But in keeping with his evangelical worldview, as Durant saw it, “the struggle” in which he wanted “Wellesley College...to take the foremost place” was not merely about women’s education or indeed women’s rights. It was also a “war of Christ against the principalities of sin, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The struggle for gender equality was one part of a transformative social “movement” of moral uplift with national, global, and even cosmic import: “God’s hand is in it; ...it is one of the great ocean currents of Christian civilization.” God, Durant thundered, “is calling to womanhood” – to Wellesley women – “to come up higher, to prepare herself for great

conflicts, for vast reforms in social life, for noblest usefulness." He urged them to see their education as "but putting on God's armor for the contest."⁸

Durant explained that Wellesley College would equip women for their special "mission" to become warriors for the "Great Protestant Faith" – "the battle-cry in the world's warfare against tyranny and sin" – by enabling them to achieve the "noblest womanhood," "the supreme development and unfolding of every power and faculty." Wellesley was not to be a finishing school to refine young ladies for genteel marriage but to "fit them for usefulness." Instructing his students that "true beauty is in the flower of use," he called on them to "make war" in the way they lived their own lives "against the old sham notion that women are to be trained only in accomplishments, to become the toys, the trifles, the amusements of their lords... [as in] old Circassia."⁹ Durant advocated that his listeners, instead of becoming mere parlor ornaments, seek work as teachers, where they could enlist in the war for Christian moral uplift by reforming young minds one by one in the classroom.

In his sermon, Durant re-imagined respectable white women not as cloistered wives and daughters but as public servants united in pursuit of a mission of Christian moral and social reform. In his view, Wellesley students' responsibility was to achieve a "noble womanhood" defined by self-sacrifice for the public good and use their fully developed capacities – moral, intellectual, spiritual – to redeem America from the ills attendant on the Gilded Age rise of corporate capitalism by educating its people. Notably, Durant's view rejected some prominent aspects of middle-class femininity – dependency, confinement to the domestic sphere, physical delicacy, frivolousness,

decorative “accomplishments,” subordination to patriarchal control – while elevating others, such as selflessness, spirituality, communal identity, and the ethic of care.

Meanwhile, he re-appropriated more masculine-associated aspects of middle class identity, such as intellectual development, higher education, and public service, recreating them as complements to the central female virtue of self-sacrificial love.

Durant’s chosen motto expressed the purpose he envisioned for his chosen women: *Non Ministrari sed Ministrare*, “not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”

The women destined this ministerial role, as Durant saw it, were white, native-born daughters of the bourgeoisie, the children of educated Protestant evangelical professionals like himself and his friends. His vision of the redemptive power of women did not extend to people of color or even foreign-born whites or those from working-class backgrounds, all of whom were seen as the targets of uplift rather than its potential missionaries. Very few American women even had access to the pre-collegiate educational resources that could qualify them for admission to the College: in 1880, less than three percent of all 17-year-olds in the U.S. even graduated from high school.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Durant’s vision did allow for a certain degree of socioeconomic diversity. As long as applicants evinced an adequate level of bourgeois respectability and academic achievement, they were qualified to attend Wellesley. And as the stories of many financial aid students prove, many daughters of widows, missionaries, or respectable but struggling farmers, one could develop such resources *without* a middle-class household income so long as one did have sufficient middle-class status and cultural capital. Durant often said that there was a place for “calico” and “velvet” girls

alike at his College, a metaphor that, tellingly, reduced class difference to the material by drawing a contrast between the cheap printed fabric worn by less wealthy girls and the opulent textiles of the rich. Durant also avowedly wanted “to keep out snobs,” defined here not so much by their class background as by as their undemocratic attitudes, vanity, lack of humility, and perceived lack of commitment to “usefulness.”¹¹ In keeping with his interest in educating women from a wider range of economic backgrounds, Durant held tuition and board artificially low in hopes of enabling less wealthy girls to attend and often informally offered further discounts to promising but still needy students.

This work considers this group of students in particular: the many young women with the academic talent and middle-class socialization required to receive admission to the College but insufficient funds to pay its fees. By 1878, the financial need of this population had become urgent enough that, at Durant’s urging, supporters of the College met to establish a formal body charged with addressing it. If the College’s purpose was to produce women who could redeem the nation, they and Durant reasoned, it was the College’s public duty to educate as many young women willing and capable of pursuing that mission as it could. With the leadership of Durant’s wife and co-founder Pauline, several wealthy women philanthropists who were long-time Durant devotees came together, as the meeting’s minutes explain, to “establish a fund to aid poor and deserving students to pursue their studies at Wellesley College,” which would be administered by an organization known as the Students’ Aid Society.¹²

For a period in the late 19th century and again in decade immediately following World War I, the Society was both highly active in fundraising and significant in bolstering students' financial aid safety net. During these times, the Society generated rich records of its activities for the perusal of its donors. As is true of any nonprofit reports, these documents provided information both for the sake of what we would today call accountability and to convince supporters to continue to give. This paper draws chiefly on annual reports and other Society documents from the years 1878 through 1898 and 1919 through 1927 to explore how the organization presented women on financial aid to its donors, why it argued they were worthy of support, and how and why its images and arguments evolved over time. These documents illuminate the changing leadership and administrative structure of the Society, which transitioned fully from the control of the self-defined "Christian ladies" – evangelical Protestant woman philanthropists – to that of alumnae in 1918, which in turn illustrate the College's tumultuous institutional history. These changes in institutional practices point to profound shifts in the power of various Wellesley's stakeholders – trustees, faculty, students, administrators, alumnae – and their visions of the meaning and purpose of higher education for women at Wellesley and beyond.

College stakeholders' sense of Wellesley's role in society – by extension, of the meaning and purpose of women's higher education – often emerged most clearly in their thinking about students on financial aid. Because of the simple fact that they could not contribute to the financial survival of the institution (and, according to the principle of opportunity cost, in fact cost the College money) without assistance, these students'

admission required explanation in a way that of paying students did not. In order to convince Wellesley supporters to give, Society leaders had to demonstrate that financial aid students' presence contributed nonmaterial but essential ways to the fulfillment of the College's mission. Therefore, in explaining what made these students' worthy of donors' support, by extension the Society had to explain what made the College's mission itself worthy of support.

As Durant's vision of a new role for white middle-class women as Christian social reformers illustrates, Wellesley provided fertile ground for its founders, supporters, administrators, faculty and alumnae to re-imagine the meaning and of white middle-class womanhood and attempt to transmit to students through speeches, the conditions of financial aid and other institutional policies, parietal rules, the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and all the other instruments governing student life on campus. Though its methods and particular goals varied from the Gilded Age into the Roaring Twenties, the College's officials' and key supporters' primary project was training individuals to successfully fulfill, at the highest possible level, the social roles reserved for middle-class women – and, between 1878 and 1927, for *white* middle-class women, mostly Protestant Christians and native-born citizens. Thus, beyond exposing the impact of institutional changes at the Society and the College and providing a entry-point to analyze the evolution of Wellesley's visions of it and women's higher education's purpose, the Society's reports illustrate the process and consequences of a far broader and deeper historical trend: the emergence of middle-class white women into the American public sphere, first as a collective of selfless

handmaidens of social reform, then as individual citizens. Thus, the history of women on financial aid at Wellesley is effectively the history of middle-class white women's adoption of and by liberal capitalist norms of behavior and identity, which define the self as an autonomous individual endowed with the rights and responsibility to participate in civic life and the economy.

Beyond analyzing this vast cultural shift, I hope also to show how it was lived by the women it most affected as it happened, encompassing several generations of Wellesley women. Society documents include first person accounts by students and qualitative and quantitative data on budgeting, work, and other key aspects of students' experiences at Wellesley. They are essential, then, to tracing the consequences of this profound shift in the nature and possibilities of white middle-class womanhood, particularly for those who, like financial aid students, balanced on the edge of otherness because their social and cultural capital exceeded their financial resources. Looking through the lens of the Wellesley experience, I ask under what terms white middle-class educated women, at least in theory, won an expanded place in public and economic life from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries and analyze the costs these terms exacted from these women – and from groups excluded from (and by) their victories.

In considering the discourse around and policies directed at one group of educated white middle-class women over several decades of momentous change at their institution and in their nation, this paper draws on several bodies of literature concerning selfhood, gender, and society from the Gilded Age through the Progressive Era. One thread concerns, of course, the rise of the women's college and women's

higher education more generally from the postbellum period through the 1920s, which have long been metaphorically side-barred in histories of American higher education (along with all other institutions primarily serving students who were not white men.)* Since the 1980s, scholars leading the intellectual movement to place women's experiences in the center of American history have found the late 19th and early 20th century women's college fertile ground for exploring gender and class construction, the ideals and practice of women's liberation and female-driven social reform movements, the developing roles of women in the professions and academic, and many more subjects of great interest to social historians and others. Two of the central texts on women's higher education are by two historians who pioneered the field of women's studies, Barbara Miller Solomon and Lynn D. Gordon. Solomon's narrative history *In the Company of Educated Women* (1985) explores American women's education from its origins in the Early Republic to the mid-20th century to trace developments along four themes: struggles for education access, the college experience, the impact of education on women's life choices, and "the uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advancement."¹³ This project implicitly takes up the latter two threads, and to some extent the second, to take a closer look at how they affected the changing discourse on financial aid. Organized as a collection of essay rather than a narrative, Gordon's *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (1990) profiles specific colleges to argue that the college women of the 1890s and 1910 represented a

* Though the situation has improved somewhat, in general the same is true today. Recent texts like Christopher J. Lucas's *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), one of the most comprehensive overviews of the subject, includes only about 30 pages that discuss the education of women and/or people of color out of over 300. Not to single out Lucas: John R. Thelin's magisterial *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) admirably incorporates women's education into each chapter, but only devotes about 45 pages to it in total out of 362.

transitional second generation. As I also discuss at length in my first and second chapters, initially separate spheres ideology legitimated women's higher education by soothing fears of women's using their education for gender-inappropriate pursuits, but this very same ideology limited women's participation in college life in ways that students and their allies ultimately found unsustainable. This narrative complements the one I suggest, and I hope that by highlighting the dramatic transition from the Durant regime that constructed students as gendered moral Christian collective to a modernized regime that viewed them as individual citizen-subjects, my case study of Wellesley provides greater insight into this key period in women's higher education alongside Gordon's own profiles.¹⁴

Besides these panoramic looks at women's education, many more historians have followed these pioneers to produce studies that focus more closely on specific institutions or broad-based phenomena in women's education. Happily for a student writing about Wellesley, many of them examine the Seven Sisters in particular, due to their cultural position as the "counterpart" to the elite men's Ivy League. American studies professor (and Wellesley alumna) Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Alma Mater* (1984) analyzes how the landscape and architectural design of the Seven Sisters colleges expressed public opinion about women's education and thus served as a vehicle through which it shaped students' experiences. Though narrower in scope and not concerned with the physical environment, this project similarly focuses on the origins and consequences of specific policies in expressing changing models of femininity. I hope to provide insights about how financial aid policies and the rhetoric underlying

them shaped student experience and offered specific models of gender identity that complement Horowitz's analysis of how college administrators used architecture and landscaping at different phases to address concerns that education would unfit women for marriage and motherhood, provide a retort to gender essentialist ideas about women's limitations, and encourage heterosexual dating and socializing.¹⁵ In the past decade or so, historians have been especially interested in how college's constructions of gender in the era on which this paper focuses shaped students' collegiate experiences and identities, taking on, for example, activism, beauty contests, the relationships between women's and their counterpart men's colleges, and women's fraternities.¹⁶ A sensitive attention to students' subjectivities and lived experiences characterizes much of this more recent body of literature. Though this paper takes as its subject an element of the college experience largely outside the hands of students themselves – financial aid policy – rather than the student-initiated activities listed above, it adds a new thread into the increasingly rich and textured tapestry of historical knowledge about women college student's experiences. Though this paper, like *Alma Mater*, focuses on the discourse produced and decisions made by college administrators and benefactors rather than students themselves, , in line with more recent works, it strives to depict their consequences, practical and subjective, for the women they most affected.

In discussing the founding ideals of Wellesley College, this project also speaks to the expansive literature on long-nineteenth century women's social reform movements that grew in conversation with that about women's education. Lori D. Ginzberg's foundational *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (1991) provides a special inspiration for

this project thanks to its sophisticated exploration of the relationship between changing class relations and the nature and results of women's benevolent work. She demonstrates both how women reformers re-appropriated ideologies of innate female morality to justify entering the public sphere and how they, often while working for their own gender liberation, also played an essential role in justifying and exerting middle class social control over less privileged people.¹⁷ This analysis of the project reflects both these findings, showing how they played out at Wellesley College in particular and happened next, as the "ideology of female benevolence" Ginzberg describes became less central to the identities and respectable public roles of middle-class white women. However, this project's key contribution to the literature on women's benevolent work is to show how one generation of benevolent women and their male comrades in Christian social reform set out to create a collective of young women trained to live out the ideology of women's benevolence to its fullest by serving as moral exemplars through teaching the children of groups they found problematic. In highlighting the rhetorical process by which women students were reconstructed as women reformers, this work explicitly links women's education and women's reform movements to show how in the Gilded Age in particular, the two phenomena were inextricably linked and mutually supporting.¹⁸

Finally, this project speaks to a literature that has for the most part excluded or side-barred the women who make up the cast of this work and those described above: ambitious panoramic histories of the United States from at least the 1870s through the 1920s that attempt to create unifying narratives about the new relations between self

and society forged in the fires of modernity. From Robert H. Wiebe's *The Search for Order* (1976) and Ronald T. Takaki's *Iron Cages* (1978) continuing through to Jeffrey P. Sklansky's *The Soul's Economy* (2002) and T. J. Jackson Lears' *Rebirth of a Nation* (2009), historians have provided sophisticated unifying theories for how Americans responded to the rise of corporate capitalism and its attendant social consequences with new visions of social order, governance, nationality, and selfhood.¹⁹ These works provide profound (and often divergent) insight into the nature, emergence, and propagation of the autonomous liberal citizen-subject as the normative model of the self and its implications for social (re)organization. However, perhaps understandably given all three historians' focus on the powerful elites who instituted, knowingly or otherwise, these changes (and Takaki's explicit focus on the construction of white masculinity), women usually play only minor roles in their unifying narratives. By examining one group of white middle class women, this work attempts to provide a narrative of their emergence into the public sphere as liberal individuals that might complement and complicate that told about middle class white men's parallel journey. It explores the discourse that shaped and was shaped by women's different contributions to and relationships with the corporate capitalist social order. By putting my work into conversation with these landmark texts, I suggest that women's experiences of selfhood in this period were just as influenced by a shifting socioeconomic landscape as men's, and that despite the constraints of their prescribed social roles, they too had significant agency in responding to the dislocating side effects of modernity. By doing so, I hope to enrich our understanding of the varying but inextricably related ways corporate

capitalism reshaped the experiences, identities, and opportunities of Americans based on gender, race, origin, and other characteristics. No narrative about the reconstruction of selfhood can be truly unifying unless it considers these facets of the self.

In keeping with its focus on the process of change over time on three different intertwined scales, this paper follows a roughly chronological structure that highlights dynamics linking the histories of the Students' Aid Society, Wellesley, and the United States as a whole.

The first chapter covers the first two decades of the College and the Society, a period corresponding, not coincidentally, with the transition from the Gilded Age to the dawn of the Progressive Era and the rising importance and normalization of the First Wave feminist movement, specifically the struggle for suffrage. During this period, middle-class reformers, especially feminists, insistently re-appropriated the gender essentialist notions of "separate spheres" ideology and True Womanhood to carve out a respectable role for middle-class white women in the public sphere. By exploring the images of financial aid students and arguments for their worthiness offered in Society publications, I will illustrate how its officers cast women as "true-hearted Christian teachers," a role premised on commitment to social reform, selfless public service, and a collective feminine moral authority. I analyze how this alternative vision of middle-class white womanhood, as radical as Durant attempted to present it as in his sermon, appealed to a bourgeois thirst for social control and renewed order, the first stirrings of Progressivism in the face of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. I then return to an individual level to analyze the consequences of this new feminine ideal for

the college women who were supposed to embody it, especially how it elided possible class differences between women on financial aid and those not by seamlessly fusing them into a collective with a shared and noble social purpose.

In the second chapter, I outline the transformative institutional changes that reshaped Wellesley just before and during the period of the Society's dormancy between Henry Fowle Durant's death in 1881 and his wife Pauline's in 1918 and relate them to the gains made by the modernizing Progressive social reformers and the women's movement. I classify this era (only somewhat facetiously) as the period of de-Durantification, when alumnae, students, faculty, and administrators successfully contested and overturned the regime of evangelical reformer Christianity at the College. As a consequence, the College's mission transformed from training an "army" of women reformers to remake society to equipping women to achieve individual success along meritocratic principles. Wellesley women's reforms elevated the importance of individual achievement, provided for far greater individual freedom, and unintentionally highlighted socioeconomic differences among students. In consequence, Wellesley student increasingly emerged as individual actors, just as middle-class women gained more and more opportunities to act as individual agents in the public sphere without losing their claim to respectable white womanhood. Simultaneously, many feminists left behind the gender essentialist 19th century argument that justified women's participation in public life only through their collective moral distinctiveness for a contrasting argument premised on gender *sameness* and individual rights.

In the third chapter, I analyze how the visions of financial aid students presented by the revived Society relate to these institutional and cultural changes and reflect on what consequences they had for the experiences of financial aid students themselves at the College. During this period, the dominant image of the financial aid student propagated by the Society was the “self help girl,” a plucky and cheerful worker who took responsibility for supporting herself and her education as much as she was able and showed great promise of success after graduation. It was no longer enough to dedicate oneself to the communal cause of social reform; the “self help girl” had to embody both the best principles of capitalist individualism (with more than a hint of 1920s optimism) and the finest spirit of the College. However, as I explain, the emergence of financial aid students as individuals in concert with changing views of the purpose of women’s higher education problematized their presence at the College, and their class identity as never before. By placing new requirements on their worthiness, the self-helper ideal made their differences from wealthier peers markedly more visible and thus threw into question their belonging at the College in the first place.

I conclude by considering how these changing visions of financial aid students illustrate the trade-offs between collectivism and individualism encountered by white middle-class women from the late 19th through the early 20th century, and, by extension, the consequences for them and for others outside their identity group of their conformity to the capitalist model of rational individualism. I ask what white middle-class women lost and gained in transforming from a communal force for social change into individual citizens.

¹ Enrollment and faculty numbers come from “College History,” *Wellesley College: About Wellesley* (wellesley.edu/about), 2012,

<http://www.wellesley.edu/about/collegehistory>.

² Matthew Sobek, “Table Af337-354 College Graduation Rate, by Cohort, Age, and Sex: 1831–1970,” in ed. Susan B. Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ All details about the Chapel come from Florence Morse Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant, Founder of Wellesley College* (New York: Century, 1924), 201-202.

⁴ Florence Morse Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant, Founder of Wellesley College* (New York: Century, 1924), 155.

⁵ Though he spoke without notes, Durant’s manuscript was discovered in 1891, a decade after his death, and immediately published for circulation among students and faculty. Kingsley reprinted it in full in her worshipful 1924 biography of Durant.

⁶ Qtd. in Kingsley, 237-8.

⁷ Qtd. in Kingsley, 238-9.

⁸ Qtd. in Kingsley, 238-9.

⁹ Qtd. in Kingsley, 238, 240, 246.

¹⁰ Claudia Goldin, “TABLE Bc258–264 Public and Private High School Graduates, by Sex and as a Percentage of All 17-year-olds: 1870–1997,” in ed. Susan B. Carter et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant*, 216.

¹² Hannah B. Goodwin, “Secretary’s Report,” *Report of the Students’ Aid Society of Wellesley College with an Address by Rev. Reuen Thomas* (Wellesley, MA: Students’ Aid Society of Wellesley College, 1878), Wellesley College Archives, 8.

¹³ Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xvii.

¹⁴ Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

¹⁶ Karen Whitney Tice, *Queens of Academe: Beauty Pageantry, Student Bodies, and College Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)

Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges: feminist values and social activism, 1875-1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010)

Laurel Ulrich, *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History* (New York; Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004);

Diana B. Turk, *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2004)

Susan Kates, *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001)

¹⁷ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Yale Historical Publications (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Other key works on the ideology and practices of women's benevolence that trace similar relationships between them and the century's profound socio-economic shifts (industrialization, urbanization, immigration include:

Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-censorship Activism, 1873-1933*, Women in American History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980).

¹⁹ T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

Jeffrey P. Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-century America*, Revised Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976).

CHAPTER 1

“True-Hearted Christian Teachers”: Wellesley Women on Financial Aid Serve in a Reformist Collective, 1878-1898



Fig. 2. The class of 1880 poses outside College Hall for a photograph in the year of their graduation. Katharine Lee Bates, later a Wellesley professor, poet, and the most famous alumna of her generation, is seated fourth from the right in the second row (with glasses).

Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery.

On May 3, 1878, just two and half years after Wellesley College had welcomed its first class, a group of “Christian ladies of Boston and vicinity” gathered at the home of Mrs. M.H. Simpson to “establish a fund to aid poor and deserving students to pursue their studies at Wellesley College.”¹ After listening to an address by founder Henry Fowle Durant, the ladies worked quickly. Before the meeting’s end, they had founded the Students’ Aid Society of Wellesley College to administer the planned fund, adopted a Constitution, and elected officers from amongst themselves.² In just two months, the Society had collected \$17,002 – nearly \$400,000 in 2013 dollars – from 46 donors, almost three fourths of them women.³ In an era of many noble causes, just before the dawn of the so-called Progressive Era, how did the Society convince these women (and men) to commit significant amounts of money to – in the words of the 1878 Constitution – “[assist] deserving young women to pursue their studies in Wellesley College?”⁴ What did the Society’s organizers believe their supporters’ money would do for the women it aided and, by extension, the institution they attended, and the American society it sought to change? And why did it matter?

The Society’s officers had to offer their potential donors convincing, appealing answers to all of these questions; in other words, they had to answer every nonprofit’s eternal question: why give? Like all nonprofits, the Society hoped to inspire readers to give, and give more, by appealing to shared values and beliefs about how to better society. The Society’s officers drew on the tenets of the Social Gospel movement, a key contemporary worldview shared by the evangelical Protestant social group to which they and their target audience belonged that charged Christians with combating the

social ills associated with the rise of corporate capitalism. The Society addressed its audience as “intelligent Christian women, who know what are the fruits of liberal culture,” but this description could just as easily be applied to the officers of the Society themselves.⁵ In the late nineteenth century, the Society’s members, whether organizers or donors, were largely white, native-born New England women rooted in the professional and business classes and committed to reformist social causes. (Their swift, effective work establishing the Society suggests their ample organizational experience.) Unlikely to have attended college themselves due to the limited options available at the time (hence the modifier “intelligent” rather than “educated”), they shared a strong faith in evangelical Protestant Christianity, the urgent importance of nationwide moral and social reform, the tenets of middle-class respectability, and the central role of white middle-class women in propagating all three. With these ideological foundations, the Gilded Age’s bourgeois woman crusaders united around a program of political action that sought to “uplift” a nation they saw as increasingly dragged into the mire by the degrading influence of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. The Society’s argument for the worthiness of its work thus reflected both the changing social landscape of the United States and Society’s members’ aspirations for and fears about its future. For these pious women, the stakes were as high as can be imagined. If they could redeem the United States from the wave of social disorganization, godlessness, civic irresponsibility, and immorality that they believed threatened to engulf it, it could in turn redeem the world – but if they failed, the nation would crumble into anarchy.

In hopes of convincing likeminded women to support them, the Society's officers sought to portray their organization's efforts to support the higher education of women who could not otherwise afford it as consistent with, and indeed essential to, advancing the shared cause of national salvation. As this chapter will show, from 1878 through 1898, the Society's officers argued for the importance of their work within this larger cause by portraying the students they aided as "true-hearted Christian teachers," who would selflessly work as educators in schools around the country.⁶ Recruits in "Christ's great army," they would serve as the foot soldiers of the reformers' war against sin by battling its influence in the minds of their pupils. By elevating their pupils through moral, intellectual, and spiritual instruction, they would purify the individual character flaws the evangelicals believed lay at the heart of the nation's social decline and thus stop its spread – but only if they could have the indispensable training provided by the College.⁷

Just like the 1875 Durant sermon discussed in the introduction, the Society's documents reveal Wellesley-associated social reformers' beliefs about the purpose of women's higher education and the proper role(s) of educated white women in American society at the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, this chapter's discursive analysis of the portrayal of women on financial aid in Society pamphlets and reports through 1898 illuminates not just the priorities of the Society's members but also the causes and consequences – for individual women, for Wellesley, and for the nation – of an alternative conception of middle-class white womanhood far removed from dependent domesticity: the enlightened Christian teacher-reformer. As the

following analysis will show, taking on this role allowed women to act in the public sphere while retaining their respectability, but only as a gender-bound collective legitimated by middle-class white women's supposed innate moral authority. The role did not open the possibility of such women participating in the public sphere on an individual basis as citizens or economic actors, but only as vessels of evangelical social reform. White middle-class women, therefore, emerged into the public sphere well before they emerged as individuals, but only in specific well-defined roles.

Henry Fowle Durant, his wife Pauline, and the circle of male and female supporters who contributed to their life's-work of Wellesley College, were deeply Christian people. In fact, without Durant's mid-life conversion in 1863 to evangelical Congregationalist Protestantism, there likely never would have been a Wellesley. As Durant biographer and 1893 Wellesley alumna Florence Converse explains, in 1863 Durant was 41 and one of the most successful lawyers in Boston. His reputation for merciless aggression in the courtroom brought him many clients but made him few friends among his colleagues, many of whom found him unscrupulous. Alongside his law practice, he had earned his fortune by investing early in the Goodrich Rubber Company.⁸ Though Henry had earned acclaim arguing against a ban on the use of the Bible in public schools, for many years spirituality was not central to his life. In contrast, Pauline had been a committed evangelical Protestant Christian since at least her teens and had long hoped that her husband would one day share her faith. She got her wish, though surely not for the reasons she would have prayed. In June 1863, the couple's

eight-year-old son Harry – their only child after the death of a month-old daughter six years before – fell ill with diphtheria. By July third Harry was dead.⁹

Having finally turned to Pauline’s God as his small son struggled to survive, the grieving father – who had in his youth transformed from dreamy poet to legal shark, from the forgettably-named “Henry Welles Smith” to the flamboyant “Henry Fowle Durant” – wasted no time in effecting his final transformation into an evangelical torchbearer. He withdrew from the bar within two week’s of Harry’s burial and turned his energies toward philanthropy and business – and private Bible study.¹⁰ Two years later, Henry, never one to do anything halfway, embarked on a career as a traveling preacher despite his lack of formal theological training.¹¹ As Pauline, deprived of her role as mother and tutor to her son, threw herself into charitable work, including playing a key role in establishing the Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Henry traveled New England preaching for almost a decade. Both husband and wife built relationships with evangelical ministers, pious laypeople, and women social reformers-philanthropists that would prove indispensable when the couple finally settled on an appropriate use of the lush West Needham estate they had once planned to bequeath to their son Harry. The exact reasons for their having decided to build a women’s college are unclear, but Converse suggests that the impetus came from a mix of personal experiences and political-religious convictions: Henry’s pre-Harvard tutelage by the brilliant and kind self-educated woman scholar Mrs. Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley; Pauline’s benevolent work with needy women at the Dedham Asylum and the YWCA; her woeful experiences at a traditional finishing school during

girlhood; and finally both Durants' sense that there was an urgent need for more and better women teachers and that the uplift of women could serve the uplift of all humanity.¹² They were further inspired by the example of Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary and Vassar College, respectively founded in 1837 and 1865. Thus, though usually understood to be the magnum opus of one man, Wellesley could not have existed without a rich heritage of female scholarship and benevolent work, most importantly that of Pauline Durant, shier than her husband but fully his co-founder; Henry's teacher Mrs. Ripley; the numerous women of the eldest two Seven Sisters; and, of course, the many woman friends and allies the Durants had made in the world of New England evangelicalism.¹³

In 1878, it was these women who answered the Durants' call to establish the Students' Aid Society. They were paragons of late 19th century Christian social mission, consistently describing themselves and their potential supporters as "Christian women" or "Christian ladies" in Society literature. Central to their identities was the belief that that they had, as women, a special power and duty to improve the moral condition of society – a vision of white bourgeois womanhood that, as previously discussed, was also essential to Henry Fowle Durant's vision of his college's mission and his students' purpose. Fittingly, at the founding of the Society, Durant appealed to these ideas of the redemptive power of female social action by "[entreating] the ladies, to whom this labor for the advancement of women's education was delegated, to accept it as a sacred trust; to work with enthusiasm and zeal, and to remember that the moral and religious welfare of their country would, in an immeasurable degree, be the outgrowth of the

culture and influence of its women.”¹⁴ In effect, as Durant’s rhetoric implied, the work of the Society was a double-shot of female social action: women reformers working to provide adequate training for the women reformers of tomorrow.

The work of the Society, of Pauline Durant, of Wellesley, and of the future Wellesley graduates the College’s founders and supporters imagined fit into what historian of women’s benevolent work Lori Ginzberg calls an “ideology of female benevolence” that originated in the early 19th century.¹⁵ Its rhetoric and assumptions pervaded not just the origins and operating principles of the Society but also the literature its officers produced to convince readers to support their work. Though the ideology’s precise intellectual heritage is murky – it seems likely to have emerged as early woman social reformers sought to explain and justify their lived experience with reference to contemporary gender beliefs – the ideology of female benevolence clearly bore a complex relationship to other 19th century ways of understanding gender. By chipping out a special place for middle-class women* in the public sphere as sources of transcendent moral authority, it simultaneously contradicted, complemented, and appropriated the “separate spheres” ideology and the related Cult of True Womanhood that stood as the most lauded expressions of middle-class gender ideals.

As Jeanne Boydston (1994) explains in *Home & Work*, separate spheres ideology emerged in the early 19th century as industrialization took hold and transformed families’ gendered division of labor. While before both American men and women’s primary worksite had been the home, many men began venturing into the outside

* I say “middle-class women” here rather than “white middle-class women” because women reformers of color, particularly black women, also often deployed the ideology of women’s benevolence. See for example Dorothy C. Salem’s *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Carlson Pub, 1990).

world to earn a living, whether as wage-laborers or as independent professionals. As “work” increasingly came to mean paid labor, women’s traditional productive and reproductive exertions were defined out of rhetorical existence as *not* work because they did not result in cash earnings for the family. Because many working-class and poor women of all races did earn money outside the home (or in it, as for piecework), the boundary between home as women’s sphere and work/public life as men’s became far more pronounced for middle-class people. It evolved into a central framework of bourgeois class identity and morality.¹⁶

Separate spheres ideology not only articulated a new kind of gender essentialism but also divided almost every imaginable human activity and physical or social space into complementary categories of male & female and public & private, thus sharply delineating what behaviors and fields of action were proper for middle-class men and for their sisters. Men had the market, the ballot box, intellect, and self-interest. Women had the home, spirituality, and self-sacrifice. The measure of a man was his worldly success, what he did, while that of a woman was her purity, piety, humility, and maternal nature (the elements of True Womanhood) – what she was. Men were independent agents: rationally self-interested producers and political actors, they protected their dependents and shaped the world and a place in it for themselves actively and aggressively. Women were members of a passive collective: selfless nurturers and caretakers, they depended on male providers and in exchange preserved morality and beauty in the shelter of the home from the amoral influence of capitalist socioeconomic competition and the necessary roughness of a democratic political

system. To preserve their own virtue and that of the nation itself, women must remain in the home so as to avoid contamination by the corrupted outside world. A family's ability to keep their women at home rather than laboring outside of it became a key marker of middle-class status, thus excluding less privileged women, and their families, from achieving respectability because they had to work for wages.¹⁷

In this way, separate spheres ideology was more than a model of gender complementarity. In its relationship with the socioeconomic hierarchy, it extended outwards beyond the individual and the family to imply a deeply conservative vision of all of society, and not only because it highlighted class differences by elevating women's leisure as a sign of respectability. It further followed from the dichotomy between masculine competition and female morality that the public world, the world of men, should be governed solely by the ruthless emergent order of laissez faire; to preserve social order, there was no need to intervene in the public sphere as long as women remained a reservoir of morality and purity in the safety of the home. Separate spheres thinking became essential element of the moral economy of the emerging corporate capitalist status quo.

But as the 19th century progressed, a number of white middle-class women looked out at that status quo from their parlor windows and found much to dissatisfy them: the suffering of the poor, the sick, the mad, the orphaned; the plagues of intemperance, prostitution, and other vices; the enslavement of over a million people; the waning dominance of Protestant Christianity; the disenfranchisement of women. In producing and perpetuating the social problems that outraged these women, the

dislocating socio-economic changes that laid the foundation for separate spheres ideology in effect also inspired its counterpoint: the ideology of women's benevolence. Woman benevolent workers varied in their goals and methods, in their political views, in whether they understood themselves as reformers, charity workers, professionals, or philanthropists, and in many other ways; they did not even universally agree on women's suffrage.¹⁸ But they all shared a desire to intervene to improve the conditions of individuals and of society, as well as conviction that it was their moral duty as women to do.¹⁹ Having internalized separate spheres ideology's claim that they were, as women, the moral paragons of society and identified ways in which social conditions did not meet their standards, the women argued that it was their duty use their capacity for moral uplift to redeem the nation itself. Staying at home could no longer suffice; the work of benevolence demanded that the respectable woman leave the parlor for the school, the slum, the orphanage, and the asylum bringing moral uplift and loving charity with her. She would better the material and moral conditions of those perceived as degraded and/or corrupted – primarily immigrants, the poor, and people of color – as the missionary of bourgeois moral values and thereby restore social order. Thus, the gender essentialist assumptions of the ideology of women's benevolence were the same as those of separate spheres ideology, but their conclusions were sharply different. The former legitimized – even celebrated – middle-class women's entry into the public sphere as benevolent workers instead of warning them against any activity outside the home as morally polluting. It even paved the way for white middle-class women to

maintain their respectability while working for pay, if only in a career defined more as a moral calling than a profession: teaching.²⁰

The officers of the Society explicitly addressed their entreaties for aid to other women – “the Christian women of America”, “intelligent Christian women, who know what are the fruits of liberal culture” – who shared these basic assumptions about the special social mission and redemptive power of virtuous women. As Ginzberg explains, “middle and upper-class women...shared a language that described their benevolent work as Christian, their means as fundamentally moral, and their mandate as uniquely female.”²¹ The women of the Society deployed this language to describe themselves, their readers, and, perhaps most importantly, the needy students they aided. By portraying Wellesley students as allies in a shared social mission of national moral purification, Society officers offered their readers the chance not merely to further the cause of women’s education in itself and to aid individual women but also the power to redeem the nation.

It is hard to exaggerate the momentous language Society publications employed to express the urgency of this cause. They consistently portrayed it as a bloodless holy war for the very soul of America. The esteemed local Congregationalist minister Rev. Reuen Thomas gave a fiery speech at the Society’s celebratory first public meeting in 1878, later printed in the organization’s first annual report as its centerpiece, in which meditated on this topic at length through the lens of education. According to Thomas, there was a war raging between “two hostile camps”: (implicitly Protestant) Christians and “miscellaneous rabble of all sorts and conditions of men, except Christian men,”

atheists, communists, and other dogmatic materialists who would deprive the nation of its Christian spirit and by extension its thirst for liberty.²² “Banish this soul-stirring book” – the Anglo-Saxon Bible – “from educational institutions, from our colleges and schools,” Thomas warned, “and the spirit of New England shall become as inert and obsequious as that of the most abject of those races that kiss their chains, and fight to uphold their tyrants with greater zeal than free-born patriots contend for their rights”²³ – “in a very little while we shall be fighting for the very existence of our society.”²⁴ Rev. Dr. N.G. Clark, in his prayers at the meeting when the Society was established, later summarized in its first report, similarly identified “the growth of skepticism, the seeds of which were being sown broadcast” as a dangerous trend. Conjuring up the xenophobia curdling among the New England elite in the face of increasing immigration from non-Protestant Southern and Eastern European countries, Society officer Mrs. Hannah B. Goodwin evoked a related existential threat: “the crowds of ignorant and superstitious foreigners who are landing, weekly, upon our shores” who, if left to their own devices, would threaten “the civil and religious interests of our country, and the sanctities of our homes.”²⁵

After dramatizing the grave conditions they and their readers hoped to counteract, Goodwin, Thomas, and other Society writers offered a solution: Wellesley women. Thomas described them as “the highest type of young women that America can supply.... young ladies of such competency and such character, that wherever they go, or howsoever in after life they may be circumstanced, they shall carry hence a mental and moral flavor which shall purify and enrich every atmosphere into which

they shall enter.”²⁶ He lamented, “if only the ideal for womanhood of this college could be realized, New England, would, without doubt, save America.”²⁷ As one of the Society’s original pamphlets asked in a direct appeal to donors, “To what better way can you make war against sin, ignorance, intemperance and superstition than by training such soldiers for Christ’s great army?”²⁸ Wellesley, then, was a boot camp for “Christ’s great army”, and thus donating would help more eager recruits learn how to better wage the great culture war for God and goodness.

But Wellesley women, including those on financial aid, would not simply do battle passively, by “[purifying] and [enriching] every atmosphere into which they shall enter” through the sheer gravity of their moral, spiritual and intellectual development. As Henry Fowle Durant explained in his sermon to the first Wellesley women in 1875, “true beauty is in the flower of use, and ”the “noblest womanhood” required active engagement with the world, not the inert purity of True Womanhood. Instead, Wellesley women would head to the front lines of battle by becoming teachers, directly reshaping young hearts and minds through careful instruction and virtuous example alike.²⁹ Wellesley-trained teachers, argued Goodwin, would through their “religious tone and intellectual culture,” “be a powerful element in educating our young people for the great responsibilities of citizenship,” thus countering the regression in religious, civic, and moral life she blamed on immigrants and their unschooled children.³⁰ Society President Mrs. Wilkinson, Society President, agreed, confiding to readers that, “I think there is no other way in which, as patriotic American women, we can so truly and faithfully serve our beloved country, as by supplying competent teachers of our own

sex to meet the requirements of every part of our fatherland." In the battle for the soul of America, the Society's officers consistently argued, "It is in the patient teaching of children – the careful molding of youthful character – that our great hope lies."³¹

Society publications went beyond merely claiming that Wellesley teachers could serve the cause: they also suggested the method by which the war would be won. By re-educating their student according to the norms of middle-class morality, Wellesley students would smooth away the disruptive differences of problematic populations, whether working-class people, religious minorities, people of color, immigrants, or colonized people abroad. According to the Society, Wellesley teachers' "refining influences" "[acted] as leaven" "in far-away mission-fields, among our colored people in the South, and in many public schools."³² This clever culinary metaphor identifies the women as the yeast that makes the raw dough rise and helps transform it into a finished product, just as teachers were supposed to *uplift* their students from their unrefined, chaotic black, non-Christian, non-American, and/or working-class³³ backgrounds and convert them into civilized, manageable citizen-subjects. Further, Wilkinson claimed, "True-hearted Christian teachers... – earnest women, loyal to our republican institutions – will prove more effective in laying and strengthening the foundations of civil and religious freedom in Utah and the great Territories of the West than any other instrumentalities, no matter how imposing and expensive they may be." Wilkinson attributed to Wellesley teachers the ability to counteract Mormonism, a great Protestant bogeyman at the time, and to construct civil society in the supposedly lawless West, thereby becoming missionaries of democracy and order no less than

Protestant Christianity. Wellesley teachers would become the agents of a paternalistic civilizing project, carried out on Americans and others found wanting by those who saw themselves as the guardians and vessels of the nation's essential virtues.

By conveying the perilous state of a nation beset by "godless men" and other "rabble" and casting Wellesley-trained teachers as its defenders, the Society's officers argued that it was their donors' Christian and patriotic duty to support the Society's efforts to provide for the education of any woman willing and able to sacrifice for the cause.* Goodwin and her colleagues hoped to convince readers that "If we assist to send one teacher out thoroughly prepared for her high mission, we shall have done something towards ushering in that blessed era when true worth, fitness, and intelligence shall receive the highest awards, and shall have no need to ask the question, 'Is life worth living?'"³⁴ A gift to the Society was not merely charity. It was a contribution towards the salvation of America, even its recreation into the meritocratic utopia Goodwin describes. But what, exactly, would salvation mean? What values would Wellesley women propagate? The Society's non-specific references to hot-button social issues, immigrants, and the Protestant God provide essential hints, but the organization's exhortations must be put into their late-nineteenth century Northeastern urban context to be fully understood.

To the native-born Protestant bourgeoisie in the late 19th century, societal redemption necessarily entailed restoring their control over social, economic, and

* And for a woman in this era, committing to a career as a teacher *was* a sacrifice, since it meant forgoing marriage and childbearing. As Mary Cookingham ("Bluestockings, Spinsters and Pedagogues") explains, women who graduated from college during the late 19th century "had two main choices: to marry or to teach" (p. 355). These were mutually exclusive options.

cultural life just as it seemed to be slipping out of their grip in the wake of ongoing socioeconomic transformation. The post-bellum Second Industrial Revolution massively enriched many of the homegrown elite, including Goodrich investor Henry Fowle Durant and many already-wealthy Boston Brahmins, and fueled the rapid growth of educated, prosperous managerial and professional classes (once again embodied by the lawyer Durant, pre-Goodrich investment). But it also transformed the physical and social landscape of the United States, particularly that of its cities, in ways that the elite and middle classes (who had, ironically, benefited most from the economic transformation) abhorred. In 1840, when Durant was in his third year at Harvard, 93,383 people lived in Boston. By the time he turned 58 and Wellesley celebrated its fifth anniversary in 1880, the population had almost quadrupled to 362,839.³⁵ As it consolidated its status as a shipping hub, Boston attracted scores of migrants in search of better livelihoods, both from the countryside and from abroad throughout the nineteenth century. In Boston, Irish immigrants, often fleeing famine, fueled the vast majority of this urban population explosion, along with many Italians. Most immigrants were working class and (to the WASPs) menacingly Catholic, and even in their home countries, few had held high status. These “vulgar” newcomers and the ways in which they seemed to transform Boston repulsed many Bostonians descended from earlier immigrants. Both simply by living their lives – working, forming Catholic churches, speaking in their ancestral languages, walking the streets, enjoying parks and taverns in their meager hours of recreation – and, in the case of the Irish, organizing politically to great effect, the new Bostonians threatened the cultural and political dominance of

those who had come to regard themselves as “native” Americans and their city as the “Athens of America,” the nation’s purest expression of its highest values.

In 1906, Henry James, who briefly attended Harvard in the 1860s and often wrote about Boston’s highly cultivated Brahmin aristocracy, reflected on what he saw as the degradation of the city by its new citizen. On returning to Boston, James was horrified to find that “gross aliens...were in serene and triumphant possession” of the city. His account eloquently expresses the fears and prejudices of the native-born bourgeoisie about plebianization throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. The change was not merely embodied by “laboring wage-earners” speaking “a rude form of Italian” or “some outland dialect unknown to me” who dared promenade in the streets; it was moral and cultural, even spiritual. “No longer,” James lamented, did “the great Puritan ‘whip,’ the whip for the conscience and nerves of local legend” “fill the sky.” Instead “a huge applied sponge, a sponge saturated with the foreign mixture” had “passed over almost everything I remembered and might still have recovered.”³⁶ The region’s ancestral moral rigor and ordered social life had been obliterated, leaving all in undifferentiated chaos.

James and others like him in effect believed that these foreign-born workers, though brought to Boston by the flows of global capital and trade, lacked the self-discipline that defined bourgeois morality and was, they believed, necessary to maintain order in the modern capitalist city, and nation. The “Puritan whip” was, in other words, a more vivid rendering of Weber’s Protestant work ethic, described in his famous 1904 book. Ironically, the WASPs’ remedy for the ills of capitalism – the

industrialization, urbanization, and immigration that had brought so-called aliens to their doors – was more capitalism. When Rev. Thomas claimed that New England could save America, he envisioned Wellesley women wielding James' whip, or at least teaching the children of immigrants to feel its lash. In the visions of the original Student's Aid Society, Wellesley-educated teachers were an integral component of the project to socialize Americans into capitalist modes of thinking and behaving, as expressed by the Protestant work ethic. Even more than they were missionaries, Durant and the Society's Christian teachers were envoys of what Robert Wiebe famously called the "search for order," the attempt to organize, rationalize, and discipline a society made unfamiliar and seemingly chaotic by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration.³⁷

Thus, from 1880 and 1890, in their efforts to attract support from fellow middle-class women reformers, the women of the Society, no less than Durant in his Sunday sermon in 1875, presented a cohesive vision of the purpose of women's education and of educated women that played on the deepest fears and hopes of their audience. They cast students on financial aid in a heroic supporting role in a dramatic national cosmology of order versus chaos. Their central argument for supporting the education of women who lacked the ability to fund it themselves was not equality of opportunity or democracy but merely the urgency of the struggle. Their side needed all the effective warriors it could get, and it was imperative that those who could fund their proper training contribute to the defense of the nation. Thus, despite to Durant's claims regarding the Wellesley project's radicalism, the College's supporters intended that

Wellesley students uphold all existing power structures besides the inequality between white men and white women, not break them down. At the heart of the revolutionary “battle-cry” of women’s education was the deep conservatism of a ruling caste that felt itself to be under siege. A cynical reading might suggest that some men in power decided, perhaps unconsciously, that if white high-status women’s liberation into the public sphere was the price they had to pay for the women’s material support for their continued cultural hegemony, it was worth it.

Though Society documents reveal much about how the supporters of women on financial aid at Wellesley understood their societal role and significance, they say less about how the students understood themselves and the expectations projected onto them as both women reformers in general and as recipients of aid at Wellesley specifically. In that it re-envisioned women as reformers who could collectively exercise agency in the public sphere rather than dependents in a patriarchal household, their personal agency often legally and socially hamstrung, the Society’s vision offered an honorable social role to white middle-class women who, like most women who attended Wellesley in this era, wanted something other than marriage and motherhood. Very many women embraced this role wholeheartedly, even, like the women who organized the Society, making it the center of their self-identities. Indeed, it was women reformers themselves who promulgated this alternative vision of women’s possibilities. As teachers and, later, as social workers and similarly professionalized public servants, educated white women often gained a considerable degree of authority and agency – even power – within their spheres of reform. They benefited from a profound solidarity

with other like-minded women and a shared sense of purpose. For these women, there was both strength and safety in numbers: the strength to effect change, and safety from the accusations of impropriety that inevitably dogged “respectable” women who dared venture into the public sphere. By acting collectively, they could influence the public sphere even though the state formally denied them the right to participate by restricting them from voting. It seems likely that many, if not most, women on financial aid at Wellesley shared the Society’s organizers’ aspirations for them, since those visions reflected the dominant alternative ideology of respectable white women’s purpose—and the only one inclusive of educated women.

The Society’s portrayal of financial aid students as full members of a unified collectivity with a shared purpose also elided potential status differences between women on financial aid, ostensibly the subject of the publications, and their wealthier peers. In presenting the decision to support the Society largely as that to support a collective female mission rather than individual students, the Society ignored the socioeconomic differences between their beneficiaries and their classmates and depicted them as a uniform collective. Though in some of the later documents from this period, the authors did include individual students’ tales of misfortune and declarations of gratitude, they placed their overarching emphasis on showing *all* Wellesley students to be future missionaries of social reform, not individually needy and worthy young women. Instead of being objects of pity or charity cases, they were fully integrated members of the student body, necessarily worthy of aid due to that membership and in theory enjoying the same privileges and responsibilities as their peers. Wellesley, in the

visions of the Society, was not a collection of competing, contrasting individuals, but a collective bound together by shared goals to serve – to minister unto – the corrupt world.

One 1875 guest of the College aptly described Wellesley as quasi-monastic community, “a new and immortal Sisterhood for Holy Service, whose ever-living and ever-present head should be none other than... Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁸ His metaphor hints at another way early Wellesley resembled a monastic community: only about half of the women college graduates of the 1870-1890s ever married, in contrast to 90 percent of their women peers without BAs.³⁹ Though plenty of the Society’s and College’s supporters were, like Pauline Durant, married women rich and leisured enough to combine family life and genteel philanthropy, a committed professional career in public service meant sacrificing or postponing marriage and family. Women college graduates who did marry married later and had fewer children than their less educated peers.⁴⁰ Wellesley women were more or less knowingly signing up to become spinsters in the short or long term, thereby abstaining from the defining moment in middle-class women’s life cycle (the wedding) and their defining role (wife and mother, “angel in the house”). Like marriage and the convent for generations of Catholics, marriage and public service work were mutually exclusive for “respectable” Protestant women of the middle-classes. In the late 19th century, just as most native-born white women married very few of them participated in the formal labor force – only 12.3 percent in 1880.* Thus, white middle-class women who chose to pursue higher education and a career in

* This pattern of very low labor force participation was distinctive to native-born white women. In the same period, for example, native-born black women worked outside the home at two to three times the rate of white women.

public service may have been making a respectable choice but by no means a typical one. As historical sociologist Zsuzsa Berend (2000) argues, spinsters, like many early Wellesley graduates, found a way to exist respectably, even thrive, within the middle class without participating in its most important institution by strenuously upholding and propagating its moral principles. In the late 19th century, the increasing “elevation and spiritualization of love and marriage,” which newly grounded it in morality and religion, and emphasis on high standards of “moral excellence” combined to make it “socially and personally acceptable not to marry if marriage involved compromising one’s moral standards.” Simultaneously, Berend writes, “there emerged a new, morally charged conceptualization of women’s love and its mission which allowed for a broader understanding of women’s usefulness,” which Ginzberg calls the ideology of women’s benevolence. Together, these changes, say Berend, allowed the spinster to emerge “as a highly moral and fully womanly creature,” even a “[champion] of uncompromising morality,” while eschewing marriage.⁴¹ Like a vestal virgin, without husband or family but tending the hearth of all Rome, the spinster declined to participate in the central social relationship of the moral system to which she devoted herself.

The image the Students’ Aid Society’s writers painted of financial aid students from 1878 to 1898 as reformers for the cause of social reform thus presents something of a paradox. The Society premised the worthiness of Wellesley students to receive aid on the idea that they would serve as missionaries of Protestant-capitalist standards of belief and behavior. But simultaneously, its visions insisted that respectable women deviate from those standards by acting in the public sphere only as a collective of

selfless public servants, not as the rational self-interested citizen-subjects into which they were trying to transform their pupils. Wellesley women were to instruct their future students in the norms of capitalism and bourgeois morality without themselves fully embodying them by starting families, as their less educated sisters were far more likely to do, or by individually participating in the market and in political life, as their college-educated brothers did. As we shall see, this dynamic tension between individualism and collectivity, gender difference and gender equality in the Society's – and the nation's – conceptions of white middle-class white womanhood continued to define such women's experiences at Wellesley and beyond through the 1920s.

¹ Goodwin, 1878, 8.

² Goodwin, 1878, 10.

³ Pauline A. Durant, "Treasurer's Report." *Report of the Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College with Address by Rev. Reuen Thomas* (Wellesley, MA: Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College, 1878), Wellesley College Archives, 30-31.

⁴ *Report of the Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College with Address by Rev. Reuen Thomas* (Wellesley, MA: Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College, 1878), Wellesley College Archives, 5.

⁵ Hannah B. Goodwin, "Secretary's Report," *Report of the Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College* (Wellesley, MA: Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College, 1883), Wellesley College Archives, 15.

⁶ Goodwin, 1883, 8.

⁷ "The Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College" (Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College, c.1880), Wellesley College Archives.

⁸ Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant*, 109.

⁹ Kingsley, 125-6.

¹⁰ Kingsley, 144.

¹¹ Kingsley, 146-148.

¹² Kingsley, 160-161.

¹³ Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant*.

¹⁴ Goodwin, 1878, 9.

¹⁵ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Yale Historical Publications (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

¹⁶ Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

See also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Boydston, *Home and Work*; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*.

¹⁸ See especially Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, "Introduction."

²⁰ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*; Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Noralee Frankel and Nancy Schrom Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²¹ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 1.

²² Reuen Thomas, "Completeness in Christian Education: An Address Delivered at Wellesley College by Rev. Reuen Thomas," in *Report of the Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College with an Address by Rev. Reuen Thomas*, ed. Hannah B. Goodwin (Wellesley, MA: Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College, 1878), 23.

²³ Thomas, "Completeness in Christian Education," 24.

²⁴ Thomas, 25.

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- ²⁵ Goodwin, 1883, 15.
- ²⁶ Thomas, 27.
- ²⁷ Thomas, 27.
- ²⁸ "The Students' Aid Society of Wellesley College" (pamphlet c. 1880), 2.
- ²⁹ Thomas, 27.
- ³⁰ Goodwin, 1882, 12.
- ³¹ Qtd. in Goodwin, 1883, 9.
- ³² Goodwin, 1883, 12.
- ³³ Even in the 1880s and 1890s, more privileged students attended private schools.
- ³⁴ Goodwin, 1878, 9.
- ³⁵ "History of Boston: 19th Century: Historical Population (Table Based on US Census & Population Estimates Data, Ctd. in Original)," Wikipedia (San Francisco, CA: Wikimedia Foundation, 2013),
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Boston#19th_century.
- ³⁶ Henry James, "Boston," *The North American Review* 182, no. 592 (March 1906.): 333–355.
- ³⁷ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976). See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
- ³⁸ Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant*, 236.
- ³⁹ Mary E. Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates, 1865–1910," *Population Studies* 38, no. 3 (1984): 350-51.
- ⁴⁰ Mary E. Cookingham, "Bluestockings, Spinsters and Pedagogues."
- ⁴¹ Zsuzsa Berend, "'The best or none!' Spinsterhood in nineteenth-century New England," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 4 (2000): 936.

CHAPTER 2

“Reasoning Beings”: Women Re-imagine Wellesley, 1881-1917



Fig. 3. Wellesley students participate in a march for suffrage in Philadelphia, 1915.
Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery.

A faithful Wellesley daughter, novelist and *Atlantic* staff writer Florence Converse may have graduated in 1893, but she never truly left her alma mater behind. As an early alumna and one of the College's first historians, she not only reflects the early ethos of the institution herself but also documented its evolution – an evolution brought about in large part by her peer alumnae and like-minded faculty and college presidents, among the first women professionals in the United States. In 1915, only a year after the fire that destroyed iconic College Hall and left Wellesley women wondering whether the College itself would survive, Converse published *The Story of Wellesley*, a celebratory history of her alma mater thematically organized around its different stakeholders: the founder, presidents, faculty, students, and alumnae. As a professor of literature before at the College before joining the *Atlantic*, Converse had become enmeshed in Wellesley's "Adamless Eden," the close-knit community made up of the unmarried, highly educated, and politically conscious all-woman faculty.¹ Converse grew particularly close with her former English professor, Vida Dutton Scudder, a Smith alumna, writer, and Christian Socialist activist about a decade older than she. By 1919, the women and their mothers moved together into a house only about a ten-minute walk from campus. Indeed, until Scudder's death in 1954, the two, like contemporary faculty pairs such as writer Katharine Lee Bates and economist Katharine Coman, lived together in a so-called "Boston" – or Wellesley – "marriage."^{*} In the late 1930s, Converse, having benefited from decades of firsthand observation of college life, decided to write an update of her original history that would include

^{*} The debate over the nature of such partnerships has raged for decades, but it is clear that for many women in such relationships, they were the most intimate and significant bonds of their adult lives. See 1. Carol Brooks Gardner, "Boston Marriages," in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009).

Wellesley's triumphs after its mid-teens trial by fire. Converse's obvious pride and love for the institution that had been at the center of her life for over forty years remained undiminished. A faithful institutional historian, Converse was wedded to a uplifting progress narrative of Wellesley's inevitable rise and growth. But even she could not avoid addressing, if only briefly, the tensions that had defined the College's administrative evolution from the time of Henry Fowle Durant's death in 1881, but especially those taking place between 1895, when his widow Pauline Durant resigned as the College's treasurer, and her death in 1917.

While discussing Mrs. Durant's death, Converse alludes to the struggle to define the College's mission and policies that the surviving founder and her allies had already lost against the women who came to the College as professors, students, and administrators. After eulogizing Mrs. Durant and her countless contributions to the College, Converse admits, "the Wellesley of the first decade of the twentieth century often puzzled and disturbed, yes, even grieved her." However, she continues, Durant "was not a narrow woman: perhaps the memory of her husband's autocratic temper, perhaps her trust in God, guarded her against the arbitrary enforcement of her will—who shall say?"² With this verbal sleight of hand, Converse transfigures Durant's failure to maintain control over the institution she helped found and finance into an act of graceful and gracious forbearance, tactfully writing out the agents responsible for the changes that caused Mrs. Durant so much distress in her twilight years: Wellesley women like her and her peers, dynamic and educated "New Women" who had their own ideas about what the College should be. Henry Fowle Durant's protégés took his

commandment that they *minister* rather than be ministered unto rather more seriously than he would have liked, at least when it came to “his” college – which had in fact become *their* college by the end of this period.

This chapter, coinciding with a fallow period for the Students’ Aid Society under Pauline Durant’s sole control, explores the context and consequences of Wellesley women’s efforts to reform and modernize the College, especially how they reflected changing ideals of middle-class white women’s place(s) in society (and expanding opportunities for such women) and affected the experiences of financial aid and other less wealthy students at the College. It leads into a conclusion that explains how these changes were borne out at the Students’ Aid Society, which was one of the last early Wellesley organizations to be reformed and re-imagined by the alumnae. As Pauline Durant lost her grip on every other College institution, she maintained control over the Society until a couple of years before her death. I discuss these cultural changes at Wellesley and in the nation in order to set the stage for the final chapter, in which the Students’ Aid Society re-emerges as a significant force in providing funding to students – and thus in articulating the role of women on financial aid at the College. From the 1880s on, women’s – students’, professors’, Presidents’ and alumnae’s – efforts to modernize, liberalize, and secularize Wellesley resulted in policies that treated students as, and attempted to mold them into, self-governing, independent individuals rather than the collective of self-sacrificing women reformers envisioned by the Durants and their supporters when they founded the College in 1875. In sense, it was the founders’ very success in creating a self-perpetuating institution – in gathering together

savvy women who joined into a community and devoted themselves to nurturing the College – that ensured that it would adapt away from their personal-freedom-limiting and evangelically inspired regime.

As the previous chapter explained, the Durants and their allies envisioned the College as a boot camp for “Christ’s great army.” This metaphor seems far less figurative when one examines the administrative regime under which the earliest Wellesley students lived. From 1875 through Henry Fowle Durant’s death in 1881, students lived under a set of rules and regulations designed to mold them into an egalitarian collective of intellectually refined, pious, humble, and socially conscious reformers. Like many organization focused on profoundly reshaping their subjects/inhabitants (e.g. prisons, asylums, boot camps) Durant’s Wellesley was a total institution. Henry Fowle Durant, as even his greatest admirers acknowledged, was a fanatical micromanager who did his best to control how students dressed, what they ate, how they prayed, and what they did with their time down to the last minute. Florence Morse Kingsley, who attended the College from 1876-1879* and wrote an almost literally hagiographic biography of Durant, gently questioned “whether or not Mr. Durant ever considered from a mathematical point of view the hours demanded of students.” But, Kingsley recalls, “the girls certainly did: behind closed doors, pencil poised in air, the amazing schedule was voted impossible.” Between breakfast at 7:00 AM and lights-out at 10:00 PM, every waking hour but one was accounted for: “nine hours devoted to study and recitations; two to domestic work and exercise; meals an hour and a half; chapels [in the morning and evening], silent hours [compulsory private

* Kingsley had to leave without graduating due to an eye problem. See Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 38.

devotional periods], and Bible classes – call it roughly an hour and twenty minutes – a grand total of fourteen hours! When were we going to have any fun?” And of course, Kingsley points out, they also had to find time “to keep their rooms in perfect order, ready for rigid inspection,” much like military cadets.³ By confining the women to a routine of study, Protestant worship, physical health, and domestic labor, Durant meant to remold them, mind, body, and soul, into his vision of “noble womanhood” in order to fit them for war against sin. Leaving the women to their own devices for even two hours was to waste time that could be spent polishing them into moral and intellectual perfection. Even compulsory domestic work had a higher purpose: according to Durant, it helped mold students into a collective by “[affording] a much to be desired opportunity of doing something for the common good” and “[teaching] mutual interdependence.”⁴

Kingsley and her peers may just as well have asked *how* they were going to have any fun as *when*, for the Durant regime also forbade student clubs, team sports, and societies; concerts, plays, and opera; candies, pastries, and ice cream or any snacks between meals; trips off campus without permission; and boxes of food from home and discouraged ostentatious, opulent, or fashionable dress.⁵ Like the strict schedule, these restrictions on activities and items Durant considered frivolous distractions at best were meant to shape students into a high-minded, pure-hearted, and selfless feminine ideal. Ironically given his chosen motto, which declared that Wellesley women should *not* be ministered unto, Durant had little concern for students’ personal freedom to choose what extracurricular interests they wanted to pursue, how and when they wanted to

worship, how to spend their time, and even what to eat or wear. His autocratic control over students' daily lives betrayed a belief that they could not achieve his ideal if left to make their own choices.

However, in addition to individually refining young women into Christian reformer paragons, some of Durant's restrictive policies also aimed to achieve more communal goals. Particularly important for our purposes are those rules that were meant to create what Durant called "democracy" among students, which to him meant a social atmosphere where distinctions of status were invisible and irrelevant in social interaction. Sumptuary restrictions, while meant to curb vanity, were also meant to erase differences in socioeconomic class so that students would perceive each other as equals. According to Durant, "snobs" who wanted to display their class privilege through showy dress or by bribing their way out of domestic work were not welcome at the College. As discussed previously, Durant was also committed to some degree of educational accessibility, at least for the girls who already possessed the cultural and social capital required to qualify for Wellesley.* He strove to keep tuition costs down and, besides urging the establishment of the Students' Aid Society, often personally assisted students who were unable to make full payments. Though not primarily intended to do so, compulsory domestic work and restrictions on recreation and treats may also have concealed socioeconomic inequalities among students by making them irrelevant to students' experiences. After all, it didn't matter who could afford to go into Boston for the theater when no one was allowed to attend in the first place; when

* It's important to note just how limited Durant's visions of "democracy" and inclusion were. Almost all Wellesley students were white, native-born, and from "respectable" middle-class families.

everyone had to spend the same amount of time each day on chores, it mattered less who could have afforded a maid.

But for Durant, creating democracy on campus meant more than softening the impact of socioeconomic inequality. He also hoped to forestall other breeds of “unworthy” status competition among students through other regulations, such as a ban on competitive sports that prevented superior athletes from setting themselves apart and above their peers, and a pass-fail grading system that did the same for superior scholars.⁶ These policies of enforced equality drove home the point made by the other restrictions on students’ behavior: the point of a Wellesley education was not personal development, but preparation for a life of service, in which a woman’s ability to approximate an ideal mattered more than her individual achievements or preferences. Durant sought to collectively students into a selfless and harmonious collective, not to provide each student the chance to reach her individual potential.

Kingsley speaks nostalgically, even proudly, of Durant’s strict regime, offering an anecdote in which she, home for her first summer break, wrote off a peer who questioned the rules against candy and theater as clearly not “Wellesley material.”⁷ In contrast, Converse, having entered Wellesley several years after Kingsley graduated (and, incidentally, having herself performed in at least one play during her time at college, portraying Puck in a Shakespeare Society rendition of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream**), dismisses it as “the old boarding-school type of discipline.”⁸ This difference in opinion points to a sharp divide between the regimes that governed student life before

* Partridge. *Shakespeare Society Members Performing A Midsummer Night’s Dream in the Woods. Florence Converse, 1893 (Puck); Mabel Wells, 1896 (Oberon); Caroline Newman, 1893 (Bottom)*. Photograph, May 27, 1893. Image wca01107 in the Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery (<http://insight.wellesley.edu:8180/luna/servlet>).

and after Henry Fowle Durant's death at in 1881. As Converse saw it, the profound changes that took place over the next decades were the product of the inevitable evolution of the College towards modernity. "The Wellesley that [President Alice Freeman] inherited" upon Durant's death* "was already straining at "its leading strings and impatient of its boarding-school horizons," she wrote in 1915, while "the Wellesley that [President] Shafer left [in 1894] was a college in every modern acceptance of the term, and its academic prestige has been confirmed and enhanced by each successive president."⁹ But what did it mean for Wellesley to be "modern", and how did it become so? And why might this modernization have distressed Pauline Durant? Though Converse's implications of inevitable progress offer a conventional and unconvincing answer, her and other Wellesley historians' documentation of the policy and administrative changes Wellesley women – faculty, students, alumnae, and administrators – implemented or argued for provide a far more satisfying one.

Each President from Freeman on instituted reforms that updated the curriculum, built up rationalized bureaucratic systems of administration, strengthened faculty voices in College governance, and, most importantly for our purposes, loosened restrictions on students' personal freedom and hence widened the space for individual expression, personal development, and status distinction. The Presidents, faculty, and administrators, allied with many alumnae, increasingly recognized students as rights-bearing individuals destined to participate in the life of the nation and of the mind.

* The reticent Ada L. Howard had always been a figurehead, since Durant had dictated almost every important decision at the College. He had picked out Freeman, the youngest faculty member at the College, as a future President during her first year as a professor in 1879. Howard stepped down when Durant died, and the board of Trustees appointed Freeman, then only 26, as her successor. See Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 51-3, 65.

They thus had to be prepared to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities that entailed. Meanwhile, students argued for policy changes on essentially the same premises. Characteristically, students of the late 1880s and early 1890s, such as Converse, said they respected then-President Shafer because “she treats us like women, and knows we are reasoning beings.”¹⁰ Wellesley students just before and after the turn of the century won major new freedoms by promoting this self-definition as competent and autonomous individuals.

Influences within and without Wellesley created the circumstances and ideological influences that encouraged and then enabled Wellesley women – students, administrators, and alumnae alike – to redefine the College as the site of individual development. In the 1880s, Presidents Palmer and Shafer loosened Durant’s strict regulations enough that a kind of intra-collegiate civil society, and organic sense of community, began to develop among students. By loosening the daily schedule and system of discipline, permitting seniors to leave campus and town at their own discretion, and allowing students to establish clubs, societies, and publications, these administrators provided Wellesley women the opportunity to participate far more in crafting their own experiences of college – and their own identities. It also led them to call for even greater freedoms and more say in governing themselves on both an individual and communal level. By the 1890s, as Wellesley was, in the words of 1949 chronicler and second-generation alumna Alice Payne Hackett, “emerging from that stage of paternal isolation, strict as it was tender and loving, into freer communication with the world outside,” where an atmosphere of political and social engagement

pervaded campus and visiting lecturers delivered speeches on war, party, politics, and labor strikes rather than Christian virtues.¹¹ Alongside wider social causes such as poverty alleviation and women’s suffrage, which provided readily adaptable arguments for fighting for on-campus women’s rights, students discussed the questions that were closer to home: mandatory Chapel attendance, “Silent Time,” and domestic work; self-government; and the ban on theater and opera attendance.¹² Especially during and after the short but momentous leadership of President Julia Irvine, the students would participate in the reinvention of the Wellesley woman as an autonomous individual focused on personal development as much as public service.

Table 1. *Wellesley College Presidents, 1875-1936*

Term of Office	Name
1875-1881	Ada Howard
1881-1887	Alice Freeman (Palmer)*
1888-1894	Helen Shafer
1894-1899	Julia Irvine
1899-1910	Caroline Hazard
1911-1936	Ellen Fitz Pendleton

The very fact that the trustees selected Irvine in 1894 signaled a shift in the priorities and backgrounds of the College’s guiding benefactors in the fourteen years since Durant’s death in 1881. By the early 1890s, the old Durant

stalwarts were becoming rapidly less influential as a growing body of alumnae took their place in deciding the College’s future. As Converse explains, the organic growth of the Wellesley alumnae community each successive class graduated coincided with a national trend that contemporary observers dubbed the “Alumni Movement.” With a touch of dry humor, Converse explains that the Movement originated when

* Palmer was her married name, which she took upon resigning from Wellesley to wed George Herbert Palmer, a Harvard philosophy professor who later wrote an adoring biography of her after her early death in 1901.

...the governing boards of the colleges made the very practical discovery that it was the duty and privilege of the alumnus to raise funds for the support of his Alma Mater. It was but natural that the graduates who banded together, usually at the instigation of trustees or directors and always with their blessing, to secure the conditional gifts proffered to universities and colleges by American multimillionaires, should quickly become sensitive to the fact that they had no power to direct the spending of the money which they had so efficiently and laboriously collected.¹³

Therefore, as at other colleges and universities, Wellesley alumnae, no doubt particularly encouraged by the imperative that they “minister unto,” spent the 1890s through 1910s establishing a powerful, effective infrastructure of fundraising bodies (doubling as social and professional networks) and advisory councils that would aid and guide their alma mater – and which still exists today along remarkably similar lines.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the stock of old Durant loyalists (and their money) dwindled with the passage of time, and – in a classic case of the instability of charismatic authority – their enthusiasm flickered with the loss of the inimitable Henry Fowle Durant. By the mid-1890s, Hackett reports, the College was in dire financial straits; Durant’s endowment had evaporated, and new benefactors were desperately needed. As she tells it, the alumnae swooped in to save the day both by donating themselves and working connections to powerful and wealthy philanthropists outside the increasingly scarce Durant circle.* Since then, the alumnae’s position among, if not as, the College’s chief benefactors has remained uncontested.

This generational turnover in the College’s key backers had a profound impact on its institutional goals and policies because of the alumnae’s experiential and

* Hackett also notes that President Caroline Hazard, chosen at a time of sharp economic distress for the College, was selected more for her social connections to elite philanthropists and ability to gracefully exploit them than for her academic or administrative credentials.

ideological differences from their predecessors. The alumnae were motivated by communal loyalty to the institution as much as, if not far more than, the instrumental political and religious goals of the College's original benefactors (explored in the previous chapter), and also shaped by their own memories of undergraduate life. In general they cared about students' perspectives and about the perpetuation of Wellesley College and its community as an end in itself far more than one of Durant's evangelical comrades of the 1870s would have. In addition, many alumnae – educated, professional, and usually single “New Women” who were a couple of generations younger than the founders' allies besides – were committed to a women's liberation movement that had evolved since its ideals had given partial life to the College in the late 1870s. Marilley (1996) argues that by the 1890s, suffragists had shifted from arguing for the “feminism of fear” of the 1870s and 1880s, which claimed citizenship on the basis that white middle-class women could stand as a bulwark against the deluge of cultural impurity and help to heal social disorder, to the “feminism of personal development,” which championed women's citizenship and autonomy as ends in themselves.¹⁵ A perhaps even more important shift, which resonated with the shift from the collective to individual, was an increasing focus on arguing from gender similarity rather than gender difference. As the goal of enfranchisement seemed ever closer as a handful of states ratified women's suffrage and more “mainstream” women offered their support for the movement, thereby diluting its radical intensity overall, its rhetorical emphasis shifted from broad-based social change to individual rights and goals.¹⁶ The alumnae defined their roles as educated middle-class women in relation to society differently

than their initial benefactors had, and, in parallel, re-imagined the role of the College in the lives of its students, who would also be their successors as caretakers of the college and members of an evolving American society.

In 1892, after some years of effort, the alumnae, allied with President Shafer, successfully pressured the Board of Trustees to establish a quota requiring that three members of the Board would be alumnae.¹⁷ The impact of this change on the Board's decisions seems to have been considerable. In 1895, the newly constituted Board signaled a shift in the College's benefactors' priorities by selecting Julia Irvine as the new President, an unusual and controversial choice for several reasons. First, Irvine, though a woman of deep faith and great moral and intellectual seriousness, was not the kind of evangelical of which Henry Fowle Durant would have approved: she was a Quaker. That the trustees in 1895 were willing to trust the leadership of the college to a woman whose religious convictions differed so widely from those of the founder," writes Converse, "indicates that even then Wellesley was beginning to outgrow her religious provincialism."¹⁸ Converse also points out that in selecting the "outsider" Irvine, the trustees also broke with the pattern of choosing as President women who had been associated with the College since its earliest days, before Durant's death, and "had known its problems only from the inside."¹⁹ Irvine had arrived as a junior professor of classics in only 1890, but Converse indicates that the Trustees saw her status as a relative newcomer, combined with her "unique personality," as a boon rather than a handicap. "As an outsider," Converse recalls, "her criticism, both constructive and destructive, was peculiarly stimulating and valuable; and even those

who resented her intrusion could not but recognize the noble disinterestedness of her ideal for Wellesley.”²⁰ (One wonders if one of those who resented Irvine was Pauline Durant, the remaining living founder.) In contrast to the Board that had deferred to the recently dead Henry Fowle Durant’s wishes in 1881 and installed the 26-year-old Palmer, then the youngest faculty member at the College, as President, these were Trustees – perhaps, even likely, including the alumnae on the Board – who wanted a no-nonsense innovator and effective administrator – a reformer – regardless of her unpopularity among traditionalists who objected to her lack of connection to the College’s early days or the evangelical Congregationalism that defined them.

If the Trustees wanted a reformer, they got one in Irvine in spades. Besides continuing to update the curriculum and institute further bureaucratic improvements, as her predecessors had, she dramatically expanded the scope of students’ individual freedoms. During her first year in office, she abolished Silent Time, much to the joy of students and the sorrow of Pauline Durant.²¹ Describing the practice as a “despotic measure,” Converse explains that Irvine decided to do away with it because of students’ opposition to the practice on the grounds of freedom of conscience. “To the student mind, especially of the late 80’s and early 90’s,” she explains, in a context of intellectual and political ferment on campus and the same new focus on women’s individual rights, “it was an attempt to fetter thought, to force religion upon free individuals, to prescribe times and seasons for spiritual exercises in which the founder of the college had no right to concern himself.”²² Before her resignation in 1899, Irvine opened the College Library on Sunday and ended mandatory Sunday Chapel

attendance,* thereby freeing students to organize their time as they wished on weekends instead of compelling them to observe the traditional day of rest. While students rejoiced, Pauline Durant, long worried about decreasing weekday Chapel attendance, mourned.²³ Much to the same response from both parties, Irvine also ended required domestic work and wiped away the infamous ban on attending the theater.²⁴ Together, these reforms dramatically changed students' lifestyles and expanded their opportunities to choose how they spent their time. Instead of enforcing Henry Fowle Durant's moral standards, exemplified by all the measures Irvine eliminated, the College's administrators handed over to students the personal responsibility to live moral and pious lives. Instead of imagining Wellesley women as a collective to be molded into an army of Christian soldiers and Wellesley as the disciplinarian boot camp that would prepare them for battle, Irvine re-imagined students as autonomous individuals endowed with rights and the College as an environment for their personal and intellectual development.

The extent to which Irvine's reforms were centered on re-crafting Wellesley into an incubator for individuals is best illustrated by one of the very few of her major reforms that was *not* initially popular among students: the introduction of ranked grades, initially on a pure credit/non system, in 1897. As banal as this reform might sound, it was initiated a major break that would completely supplant tradition of concealing students' grades from them over the next fifteen years. As Converse explains, "Mr. Durant had feared that a knowledge of the marks would arouse

* However, students were still expected to attend off-campus services of their choice if they did not attend at Wellesley.

unworthy competition” among students.²⁵ This was more than matter of preserving democracy among students by concealing differences that could spawn status inequality. As Durant saw it, highlighting individual achievement would distract students from what should be their true goal: to serve the public good as a *collective*, not to win individual distinction. The idea that students might commit themselves to learning in order to satisfy personal ambition rather than better themselves to better serve the public good was unseemly. Any competition among students – to win admiration or awards, or simply out of pride and a thirst to win – implied that a Wellesley education encouraged women to be something other than selfless, thus violating the most sacred premise of the True Womanhood ideology that legitimated the College’s mission to educate women to engage in public life. In the 1870s and 1880s, evidence of any competition among women at the College would have violated Durant’s gendered moral code and may have threatened most Americans’, including evangelical reformers’, ability to tolerate, much less support, his cause. It was only permissible for respectable women to participate in public life (and the education that trained them for it) if they did so with a mindset of pure self-sacrifice, untainted by personal ambition.

But by the turn of the century, the bounds of what was acceptable for white middle-class women had greatly expanded. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, educated white women could take advantage of professional opportunities that ranged beyond teaching into social and public service, clerical work, the professions, and beyond. Administrators at elite men and women’s college sought

to expand equality of opportunity, recruit the best talent, and prepare students for professional competition in the working world by implementing meritocratic measures of selecting and rewarding students.²⁶ In keeping with this trend, in 1901, Irvine's successor Caroline Hazard introduced Honor Scholarships that not only rewarded students for exceptional academic performance but also publicly acclaimed the recipients of the award. As Converse writes, immediately "a storm of protest burst among the undergraduates," and "not the least vehement of these protestants were the 'Honor girls' themselves." Because the credit/non-credit system established in 1897 still prevailed, the students recognized had not previously known that they had received high marks, and to be singled out from their peers, writes Converse with some condescension, "seems to have caused them a mortification more keen than that experienced by St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar." Converse reports that students, "wrong-headed but right-hearted," objected to the new policy on the grounds that it "'degraded'" "the college ideal" of equality. As Converse tells it, eventually meritocratic ideals, which she sees as inherently and obviously just, privileging equality of opportunity of equality won out over what she sharply condemns as "the mists of sentiment" and "ethical haziness." In sharp contrast to Henry Fowle Durant, by the 1900s, President Hazard and her fellow administrators and faculty, along with alumnae such as Converse, saw it not just practicable (to incentivize higher achievement) but morally superior encourage competition among students. As Converse's nearly Social Darwinist justification for merit-based scholarships makes clear, they saw it as inherently unjust *not* to make status distinctions between high-achievers and the less

accomplished. "The pseudo-compassion which would conceal the idle and the stupid," wrote Converse, "...[is] unfair, since the ant and the grasshopper would earn like reward, and no democracy has yet claimed that those who do not work shall eat."²⁷ Such arguments, which had long applied to men, had until the turn of the century rarely been explicitly applied to women, and Converse and her peers' use of them signals how much they saw women as full participants in, rather than handmaidens of, the corporate capitalist political/moral economy. Though at least in this case many students' sense of solidarity with each other (or resistance to status distinction) still overwhelmed their commitment to individualism, Converse reports that by 1912, when faculty they had come to "an intelligent appreciation of the intellectual and ethical value of the new privilege."²⁸ Post-1881 Wellesley women, influenced by shifting feminist ideologies (and wider cultural shifts towards corporate-capitalist liberal individualism) and educated women's expanding opportunities, broke dramatically with their founder and re-imagined the recognition of individual achievement as a moral imperative, not a moral hazard, and thus the College as a training ground for autonomous individuals, not a collective.

These shifts in turn signaled a profound shift in how Wellesley leaders imagined Wellesley women's role in society: from handmaidens of the corporate-capitalist political and social order to full participants in it. Tellingly, the same year as President Hazard established the Honor Scholarships and institutionalized meritocracy at the college, she delighted students by agreeing to their long-running calls for an elected student government that would allow the young women to self-govern on matters of

student life, just as faculty governed academic matters.²⁹ Thus, nineteen years before the nation enfranchised women, fully recognizing themselves as adults and “reasoning beings—rational, autonomous individuals endowed with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship—Wellesley College enfranchised its students. College Government, in the eyes of the College’s benefactors and administrators, would serve as a laboratory for citizenship, training students to participate in public life as individuals rather than as an influential collective. This point of view, the development of which this chapter has traced, was best expressed by President Ellen Fitz Pendleton— who, not coincidentally, was the first alumna president of the College and represented the modernized vision of Wellesley so many of her peers advocated. In 1911, during her first year in office, Pendleton explained that she saw the purpose of education, and by extension the rights and responsibilities of men and women, as essentially gender neutral: “Happily for both, men and women must work together in the world, and I venture to say that the function of a college for men is not essentially different from that of a college for women.” Though she and her contemporaries would have denied it, this was a radical reimagining of Wellesley’s, and educated women’s, role in society relative to the original visions of Henry Fowle Durant, which was premised on gender difference and female collective action. Pendleton argued that the function of the College— of any college— was to equip students to become exemplary citizens and scholars: to think “clearly and independently” and “[view] every question not only from his own standpoint but from that of the community,” to serve the nation and community, and “above all” to “[work] hard in whatever kind of endeavor his lot may be cast.” This last

requirement in particular shows illustrates the extent to which civic and capitalist norms of behavior had intertwined in the thinking of the American middle class, as represented by Pendleton, by the 1910s: as for Converse, hard work for work's sake, rather than for any larger social end (which had been central to Durant's vision of Wellesley), was a moral imperative. Instead of prescribing a particular expected role for graduates – she explicitly stated that it was *not* the role of the college to prepare student specifically to be teachers – Pendleton saw the college's mission as producing “men and women” capable of thriving in the professions and ably participating in political life, “with sound bodies, pure hearts and clear minds.”³⁰ The break with the Durant-ruled College of the past was complete. Pendleton's Wellesley focused on the cultivation of individualist liberal citizens, autonomous actors with the duty and freedom to participate in political and economic life, rather than a collective of selfless Christian women reformers, missionaries of capitalist norms of behavior and social organization rather than full participants in them.

As mentioned in the introduction, the rise of the alumnae as a key influence on the College and the regime of modernization, secularization, and individualization they and they administrators they helped appoint enacted left Pauline Durant, living relic of the first age of Wellesley, alienated and increasingly less powerful at the institution she had helped to found. In 1895, she resigned as the College's Treasurer, perhaps under pressure from President Irvine, who immediately installed Alpheus H. Hardy, a wealthy and prominent Boston businessman and College benefactor,* as her

* Alpheus H. Hardy, a graduate of the Phillips Andover Academy and Harvard College, was the son of Alpheus Hardy, a Boston merchant who earned his fortune in the famous East India trade. The elder Hardy died of blood

replacement. Given the fact that College was in dire financial straits and could no longer rely on the living or dead Durants for its support (Wellesley was \$103,048.14 in debt—equivalent to more than \$2.97 million today, and the endowment established by Henry upon his death had become almost worthless), it is not unlikely that Irvine or others pressured Pauline to leave to make way for a more qualified administrator. Indeed, Converse wrote, as “trustees and alumnae [labored] incessantly to pay the expenses of the college and to secure an endowment fund,” “what Wellesley owes to the unstinted devotion of Mr. Hardy during these lean years can never be adequately expressed,” suggesting that Pauline’s departure was significant in ensuring the College’s survival.³¹ Pauline thereafter became secretary of the Board of Trustees, but as the above analysis of Wellesley’s evolution during the last decades of her life suggests, it seems that she, much to her distress, was not able to push the College back on to the course established by her and her husband in the 1870s.

Pauline did, however, maintain sole control over the Students’ Aid Society. The Society remained one of the last holdouts from Wellesley’s modernization, lingering on in a neglected twilight existence as Durant’s personal fiefdom for almost 20 years. Even before 1900, as the College Presidents who succeeded Henry Fowle Durant weakened his Christian boot-camp regime, the rhetoric of the Society was beginning to seem dated. As political and intellectual ferment in the feminist movement pushed individual rights and gender similarity to the forefront ahead of women’s special social mission, the Society’s vision of Wellesley women on financial aid became crystallized in amber.

poisoning after accidentally cutting himself while clipping coupons. In other words, the Hardy family had an impeccable Bostonian WASP pedigree: fantastic wealth and absurd frugality (“A Noted Bostonian Dead: The Hon. Alpheus Hardy Succumbs to a Peculiar Accident,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1887, 1).

Its organizational and fundraising structures were equally fossilized. After its last report in 1898, the Society operated on a remarkably informal basis as “a coterie of Mrs. Durant’s friends” even as an ever-increasing body of alumnae dedicated themselves to donating to and fundraising on behalf of their beloved alma mater and its current students.³² As Mary Ellen Martin, a 1973 alumna explained in her economics honors thesis on Wellesley’s financial aid history, “Mrs. Durant was the focal point of the organization. Members contributed out of affection for [her], rather than out of loyalty to Wellesley.”³³ The Society was throwback to the College’s earliest days, when it of necessity relied mainly the personal friends and admirers of the Durants for its support, rather than the alumnae. Thus, as these original patrons aged, the Society’s archaic support network sapped its financial vitality, and as it failed to attract new donors, it became largely dormant. As the revived Society’s first annual report put it in 1919, “With the death of Mr. Durant [in 1881], with various changes of time and fortune, and finally with the long decline of Mrs. Durant, the resources of the Society lessened and its activities were of necessity curtailed.”³⁴

By 1900, the Society merely functioned as a scholarship fundraiser – not a particularly effective one – and distributor of certain College funds.³⁵ From 1898 until a year before Pauline Durant’s 1917 death, the Society lacked any formal procedures that instituted the systematic organization, accountability, meritocracy, and democratic decision-making that forward-thinking Wellesley women had already applied at the rest of the College. Mary Caswell, the Society’s treasurer and the Durants’ longtime secretary, distributed aid at her discretion without any formal selection or reporting

process.³⁶ Few accounting records, annual reports, or gift solicitations from this period have survived, suggesting either lax recordkeeping or a paucity of documentation in the first place. Since the Society's donors gave habitually out of personal loyalty to Pauline Durant and needed no other convincing to continue, such paperwork probably seemed superfluous to Caswell and her employer.

But as the Wellesley community expanded, strengthened, and developed its own identity outside the Durants, eventually so too did the Society. In 1916, as Pauline Durant grew ever frailer, a group of alumnae, led by an elected body called the Committee on Undergraduate Activities, set about reviving and reorganizing the Society. It's unclear how they obtained permission to take over the organization, which by now existed in name only, from Pauline, but given that longtime Durant secretary Caswell stayed on after the transition of power, it seems likely that Pauline, by then 84 and confined to her home as an "invalid,"³⁷ willingly passed on her responsibilities to a younger generation. The alumnae took rapid action to distinguish the Society from the College and define its purpose. Mrs. Elva Young Van Winkle, an 1896 graduate, drew on her expertise as a lawyer—a very rare qualification at the time for a woman—to take the lead in legally incorporating the organization in the state of Massachusetts.³⁸ Instead of a listless appendage of the College, the Society was now an independent body that could collect and distribute its own funds on behalf of, as its charter stated, "students at Wellesley College whose personal means [were] insufficient for their needs."³⁹ The alumnae, well-versed by now in reform, implemented the modernization measures that had taken decades to take hold in other College institutions over the course of only a

couple of years. The alumnae elected a board from amongst themselves, set an annual meeting date, implemented modern accounting practices, and developed a systematic fundraising program targeted at alumnae around the country through preexisting networks. The alumnae quickly proved themselves consummate Progressive Era reformers, focusing on sharing and collecting useful information, standardizing procedures, and achieving measurable results. They instituted a formal application process, in which a committee of Society members selected aid recipients based on applications, interviews, letters of recommendation, and assessments by faculty and staff. They collected information on short- and longer-term outcomes for the students they aided, studied how they could best help them, and reached out to prospective students and parents worried about paying for college by sending out information on the cost of attendance and financial aid available.⁴⁰

Thus, by the time Pauline Durant died in spring 1917, the alumnae were well on their way to transforming the Society from an informal and little-known organization to an active independent institution that played a visible role in alumnae's and students' relationships with their alma mater – and achieved great success in meeting its funding goals. Alumnae who gave through regional clubs and for reunion fundraising drives comprised the majority of supporters, and current students who could afford to often gave too. A number of faculty and staff maintained yearly subscriptions, thereby re-investing the salaries they earned from the college into its student body. Competition among regions, classes, and academic departments helped energize giving campaigns, and between 1919 and 1926, the Society was able to aid between 50 and 80 students each

year with funding that averaged \$113 to \$245 (between \$1,500 to \$3,200 in today's dollars) per gift or loan. Reinvigorating the Students' Aid Society was one of the great triumphs of the Alumni (or Alumnae) Movement at the College, the final conquest over the Durant's legacy.

The Society's new leaders tried to ensure their giving complemented that of the College, instead of replicating it, to maximize their impact on students' financial wellbeing. Therefore, they decided to provide not just scholarships for tuition and room & board but also supplementary aid, in the form of loans, grants, and gifts in kind, which student could use to meet other expenses. This policy shift meant that the Society's organizers, if unintentionally, were responding to an increasingly notable feature of student life at Wellesley College: socioeconomic inequality, which had been rendered newly visible and problematic by the erosion of the Durants' moralizing regime between 1881 and the 1910s. By increasing opportunities to spend, the personal freedoms granted to students – to participate in extracurricular activities, travel into Boston at their discretion, attend the opera, dress flashily, eat what and when they liked, and more – unintentionally highlighted the difference between those who could afford these new features of student life and those who could not. The elimination of compulsory domestic work, accompanied by the introduction of voluntary work-study jobs, definitely marked working students as less wealthy than their non-working peers. The introduction of less expensive co-operative housing schemes, in which students did their own cooking and cleaning, was welcomed by many less wealthy students but similarly marked their economic differences from their peers. By treating students as

identical individuals endowed with equal rights and offering them expanded opportunities to act freely in an absolute sense, Wellesley administrators unintentionally highlighted the economic differences that ensured students had *unequal* access to opportunities to act freely relative to each other. Paradoxically, Durant's autocratic regime had enforced a kind of equality by limiting freedom. Though probably nearly all students in the 1920s and late 1910s, regardless of their socioeconomic status, appreciated the expanded personal freedoms previous classes had won for and Presidents had granted to them, the policy changes posed new practical and social problems for less wealthy women. The Students' Aid Society addressed these not just practically, by changing how it distributed money, but also ideologically, by changing its rhetoric to reflect the emergence of the Wellesley student as an individual and the way it newly problematized the definition of students on financial aid. The next chapter will analyze how the Society's organizers accomplished this, and the implications of their response for our understanding of white middle-class women's identities and experience at Wellesley and beyond.

¹ See Patricia Ann Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995).

² Florence Converse, *Wellesley College: A Chronicle of the Years 1875-1938* (Wellesley, MA: Hathaway House Bookshop, 1939), 188-221.

³ Kingsley, *The Life of Henry Fowle Durant*, 226-7.

⁴ Kingsley, 216.

⁵ Kingsley, 212, 219-221.

⁶ Converse, *Wellesley College*, 96.

⁷ Kingsley, 275.

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- ⁸ Florence Converse, *The Story of Wellesley* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1915), 80.
- ⁹ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 51.
- ¹⁰ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 85.
- ¹¹ Alice Payne Hackett, *Wellesley, Part of the American Story* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949), 122-123.
- ¹² Hackett, *Wellesley*, 120-122.
- ¹³ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 240-241.
- ¹⁴ See Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, "The Loyal Alumnae."
- ¹⁵ Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁶ See Sara M. Evans, "'Maternal Commonwealth' in the Gilded Age" and "Women and Modernity," *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997).
- ¹⁷ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 243.
- ¹⁸ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 88.
- ¹⁹ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 85.
- ²⁰ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 86.
- ²¹ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 125.
- ²² Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 92.
- ²³ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 125.
- ²⁴ Hackett, *Wellesley*, 125-6.
- ²⁵ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 96.
- ²⁶ Jerome Karabel, "The Origins of Selective Admissions," *The Chosen: the Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).
- ²⁷ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 124-5.
- ²⁸ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 124-5.
- ²⁹ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 108, 181-184.
- ³⁰ Converse, *The Story of Wellesley*, 115-119
- ³¹ Converse, *Wellesley College*, 63-64.

³² Mary Ellen Martin, "An Historical Analysis of Financial Aid At Wellesley College" (Economics Honors Thesis, Wellesley College, 1973), Wellesley College Archives, 15.

³³ Martin, "An Historical Analysis," 7.

³⁴ Elizabeth Seelman Kingsley and Abbie L. Paige, *Report of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Incorporated, for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1919*, Wellesley College Bulletin, 3 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, October 1919), Wellesley College Archives.

³⁵ Martin, "An Historical Analysis," 12-13.

³⁶ Martin, "An Historical Analysis," 7.

³⁷ Converse, *Wellesley College*, 200.

³⁸ Kingsley & Paige, 1919, 3.

³⁹ Martin, "An Historical Analysis," 15.

⁴⁰ Kingsley & Paige, 1919.

CHAPTER 3.

“Self-Help Girls”:
Wellesley Women on Financial Aid Emerge as Individuals,
1918-1927



Fig. 4. Seniors Berenice Smith, right, and Phyllis Barnes, left, wait for hoop rolling to begin on May 8, 1928. The Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery.

After the alumnae takeover, the Students' Aid Society's rhetoric about its beneficiaries underwent a transformation at least as striking as that of its organizational structure. Abandoning wholesale the old rhetoric about Christian service and female social mission, it instead presented arguments rooted in liberal individualism, elevating meritocracy, equality of opportunity, and self-sufficiency to the center of its mission. Thus, the images of financial aid students that Society writers presented to donors between 1918 and 1927 bore little resemblance to the holy army of missionary-like teachers trumpeted in the 1880s and 1890s. The Society's organizers, now alumnae instead of evangelical Durant acolytes did not argue for the necessity of providing financial aid on the basis of the public good – that is, that educating more women at Wellesley was essential to winning the culture war against the forces of atheism, chaos, and vulgarity. The women of the revived Society conceived of and presented financial aid recipients not as a socially useful collective but as personally worthy individuals. Instead of relying on evangelical exhortations, they argued that students deserved to receive aid on the basis of their contributions to and achievements within the College as well as their exemplary characters and potential for future success. If Wellesley was to be a meritocracy, the Society's leaders argued, it must provide adequate financial aid to less wealthy women who are as accomplished as their peers to create greater equality of educational opportunity. Through their sunny portraits of women on financial aid as consummate representatives of a highly meritocratic "Wellesley spirit," the Society's organizers thus urged their audience of mainly fellow alumnae to give on the basis of loyalty to the institution and care for their young Wellesley sisters. If both the

benefactors and beneficiaries of the early Society had shared a solidarity based on commitment to evangelical goals for social change and a special feminine reform mission, those of the revived Society shared a solidarity based on their commitment to Wellesley.

But the Society's 1920s portrayal of women on financial aid did not only evolve as the College matured, modernized, and gained a lively community of alumnae; it also reflected profound changes in how Americans conceived of white middle-class womanhood and in the behavior expected of such women. Rather than the nun-like Christian teacher, the archetypal student on financial aid during this era was the "self helper," "self-helping student," or "self help girl." Indeed, the Society's leaders almost invariably used these terms to refer to student receiving financial aid. In a literal sense the term "self helper" described a student receiving financial aid who also contributed some of her own support, usually through wage work. But it also expressed some of the proudest tenets of capitalist individualism and bourgeois morality: that individuals had a moral responsibility to provide for themselves, and that individuals' ability to do so determined the strength of their communities and nations. In the Victorian era, Samuel Smiles, a Victorian Scottish reformer and writer, popularized the term "self help" by using it as the title of a didactic text that argued not only that "the spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual" but that "help from without is often enfeebling in its effects."¹ A radical turned liberal concerned with poverty and socioeconomic inequality, Smiles "came to look to individual improvement rather than structural change as the chief means of social advance,"² thus and advocated that the

most even the best institution could do to help a person was “to leave him free to develop himself and improve his individual condition.”³ The key to bettering one’s own moral and material condition, and that of society as a whole, was to work. Each person had individual responsibility for their fate that was also a responsibility to the community and nation work hard to support themselves. As historian Rupert Wilkinson explains in his history of American financial aid, by the 1920s, such ideas, which lay at the heart of liberalism and bourgeois morality, had contributed the development of social Darwinism, which presenting aiding the “unfit” as a threat to society’s survival, and began to reshape how college provisioned aid. Pure need-based gifts were de-emphasized in favor of merit-based awards that students “earned” based on their academic achievements, or “self-help” plans that offered students to opportunity to work on or near campus to pay at least some of their own way, and build character in the mean time.⁴

As explored previously, in much of the nineteenth century, white middle-class women and girls had been exempted from the responsibility of self-help because the separate sphere ideology portrayed them as the necessary selfless, emotive, collectivist counterparts to self-interested, rational, autonomous men. But by the turn of the century, increasingly more Americans, especially women suffragists whom many Wellesley women sympathized with (or were), argued that women too should be able act freely and equally as independent agents in the public sphere – to vote, work, make contracts, and exercise all the privileges of liberal citizenship – based on their universal rights, not their gendered moral superiority. In other words, women should be

identical, rather than complementary, to their male counterparts, meaning that the same moral judgments regarding self-help should be equally applied to both sexes. In the Students' Aid Society, the influence of liberal individualism both on re-imaginings of white middle-class women's proper social roles and on the provision of educational aid come together vividly in the Society's organizers' rhetoric, especially their savvy rebranding of students on aid as "self-helpers."

The image of the self-helper reflected an ideal of respectable white women as independent actors and full participants in the public sphere and the economy, endowed with all the rights and responsibilities of an individual citizen requisite in the capitalist political economy – including the responsibility to support herself and not be a burden on society. The Society lionized the way self-helpers took on the same personal responsibility for financial independence so long expected of white men under the regime of capitalist morality. Whereas in the late 19th century middle-class white women could only work for pay and maintain their respectability if they did so selflessly, to serve the greater good of society, the Wellesley self-helper was heroized for working for her own *personal* uplift and financial support. Instead of proving her worthiness to receive aid to the Society and its members by joining a self-sacrificing collective of women, she did so by supporting herself as an independent self-interested individual. The central importance of paid work in the Society's discussions of its beneficiaries suggests how much its audience of fellow Wellesley women had internalized capitalist standards of behavior in their self-identities and their judgments of other women.

Thus, in the 1920s worthiness to receive aid as portrayed by the Society hinged on both striving to support oneself and similarity to one's peers. However, these two standards did not always complement each other. Even though almost all financial aid students possessed similar social, though not financial, status as their peers, their participation in wage work nonetheless called the self helpers' gendered class identity, and therefore their belonging at Wellesley, a resolutely middle-class institution, into question. This chapter thus explores not just how the Society argued for the worthiness of its cause and its beneficiaries but also how the Society addressed often unspoken concerns about self-helpers' place at Wellesley. The Society's publications reflect efforts to resolve these implicit tensions and uncertainties on the part of the Society's leaders and the students who contributed to their reports. The accounts of these women — alumnae from the 1890s and 1920s students alike — illuminate how the increasingly closer but still often fraught and contested relationship between middle-class white womanhood and capitalist norms of behavior, encapsulated elegantly in the notion of "self help," and the new demands liberal individualism placed on women played out on the ground. These stories, in other words, tell us something about what it meant for women to become individuals in the eyes of their peers, benefactors, and fellow citizens — and themselves.

As explored in the previous chapter, over the decades after its founding, Wellesley's new generations of leaders implemented policies designed to strengthen meritocracy at the College, a move of a piece with the overall move towards educating students for individual success. Instead of seeing students collectively and somewhat

interchangeably as recruits they would mold into agents of social reform, as the Durants and their allies had, the Society's leaders and their contemporaries in the College administration saw each student as *individually* bringing personal talents to the College, which she could develop for her own, not the public, good. If a girl was sufficiently talented, she deserved the kind of education that would allow her to meet her full potential. Society leaders of the 1920s thus defined Wellesley students by ability, not social background, and linked the survival of College as an institution to its ability to educate the best and brightest – to live up to its mission rather than to its mere financial survival.

The Society thus had a vital role to play in supporting the College's mission by helping less wealthy but still worthy students to attend. In 1920, Society President Abbie L. Paige explained that Society members wished "to keep Wellesley from becoming a rich girl's college," despite the financial stability that would offer. Paige explained that this commitment was important "because, first of all, we as Americans believe that our young people should have all the education for which they show capacity [and] because we as Wellesley people believe in making the service of our college extend to all classes and kinds of people."⁵ Paige's assertion about the shared convictions of "we as Wellesley people" reflects the evolution of the College's mission from educating women as a collective for the public good towards educating individual women for *their* own good. According to Paige, 1920s Society's method of supporting the overall Wellesley mission was to strengthen a certain kind of educational

accessibility and equity: it would help build a better meritocracy at Wellesley by knocking down financial barriers to talented students' matriculation.

To prove that the Society's mission to support the education of less wealthy students did in fact support the College's larger meritocratic mission, the organization's leaders needed to prove their argument's premise that such students were as accomplished as their paying peers. Society writers acknowledged the importance of proving this when they intimated to readers that the Society knew one of the most important questions they might ask was "What sort of girls are we bringing to and keeping at Wellesley?"⁶ In part, leaders reassured readers that the "sort of girls" their gifts supported were the *right* sort—just as good as their peers rather than mere charity cases—by emphasizing the rigor of the Society's selection process. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, the women of the revived society had implemented a formalized, documented, and information-based selection process for aid applicants that contrasted sharply with the informal process used during the 1898 to 1916 fallow years. These new policies not only reflected the Progressive thirst for rational, objective, data-driven procedures for allocating resources that had reshaped all parts of College life but also the Society's imperative to prove that their beneficiaries could thrive at Wellesley as well as their wealthier peers. The Society described how decisions to allocate aid were based not only on need but also on a candidate's academic "marks, and the personal opinion of her caliber as an individual and as a student obtained from every member of the faculty and every officer of government who dealt with her in any capacity." Every spring the Society asked faculty and staff to contribute information on

applicants to help the Society assess their worthiness on four dimensions reflecting the elements of merit as defined at the College: “scholarship, character, personal worth, and promise.” Secretary Mary Caswell also noted, “Heads of House may be of great use” in illuminating “health, college citizenship, personality, social promise, and habits of expenditure.”⁷ Collecting such information required contacting many busy College employees and collating their observations into what must have been extensive files. These efforts indicate the importance the Society, and its members, placed on determining that beneficiaries were worth the expenditure of aid.

Not only did the Society’s writers try to reassure donors that the organization’s procedures screened out candidates who could not thrive in the College’s meritocratic environment, they also illustrated financial aid students’ ability to compete with their peers by lauding their academic and extracurricular achievements. Reflecting a Progressive Era appetite for empirical data, the Society offered up a rich variety of quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate its beneficiaries’ worthiness in its annual reports. To demonstrate that women on financial aid achieved distinction at impressive rates, publications made a point of always listing the numbers of supported students who had won high college government offices or membership in Phi Beta Kappa alongside the numbers of student supported. These two data points measured success in two key arenas of achievement in which financial aid students had to show equal ability as their peers: academics, which stood in for intellect and work ethic, and “college citizenship” (participation in extracurricular activities), which stood in for community-spiritedness and what would today be called “leadership.”

The simplest and most important sort of worthiness for self-helpers to prove, and for the Society to demonstrate to their supporters, was academic success. If self-helpers could keep up academically with their peers, as illustrated by their grades and scholarly honors, then they had cleared the first hurdle of proving that they deserved their places at Wellesley. Notably, this emphasis on “proving one’s worth” academically, in combination with limited funds, led the Society, and the College as a whole, to avoid providing any aid to freshmen, with very few exceptions, out of concern that they might earn low grades. Untested freshmen were riskier investments than upperclasswomen. Nevertheless, the Society assisted freshmen whenever it had the surplus funds to do so – though significantly, usually only those who came strongly recommended by alumnae, who were alumnae daughters or nieces, or “who after mid-year’s sufficiently proved their worth.”⁸

Despite the lower priority it placed on assisting academically unproven freshman in practice, the Society in principle deplored the lack of financial support they received out of concern for how it undermined meritocracy at the College by forcing promising students who could not pay initial fees to forgo a Wellesley education entirely. One Society annual report argued that Wellesley “shall lose a great deal of the best college material to local colleges unless we continue to increase our funds...we are losing yearly good material to other colleges that can promise more at the start.”⁹ In 1925, the Society celebrated the College’s decision to establish several freshman scholarships, available to “all candidates who truly win it by school and personal and College Board records” – i.e., through strong academic performance. The Society

officers had even grander ambitions “for the creation of Freshman Scholarship Fund so large that word of it could be sent to every high school and preparatory school throughout the whole country that every able girl whose mind is turning toward college, but whose pocketbook is turning her elsewhere, might hear and see and know that at Wellesley there is provision for All the Best.”¹⁰ This vision of far greater equality of educational opportunity at the College would unfortunately go unrealized, but it demonstrates the central place of meritocratic principles in the Society’s philosophy of its work and of the importance of academic achievement in its efforts to prove that less wealthy girls equaled their peers in worthiness of a Wellesley education.

In keeping with their faith in the importance of academic success, the Society highlighted the triumphs of its students as often as possible. The section of its reports discussing scholarship always appeared first, suggesting its high rank among the Society’s and its supporters’ criteria for worthiness. Every year, the Society enumerated how many of its beneficiaries had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, earned places on the Honor Roll, and been named Wellesley College and Durant Scholars, the equivalent graduating magna or summa cum laude. The self-helpers had a strong showing nearly every year, taking, for example, four out of seven Phi Beta Kappa slots in 1921.¹¹ “Wellesley experience,” concluded the Society’s reporter proudly, “agrees with the reports from Yale and Princeton that the student who cares enough for his college education to work for it usually gains in his academic work a rating above the average, and at the same time takes part in college activities.”¹² In no sense, then, could aiding such students be called mere charity; it was simply giving students the education they

deserved by dint of their ability to excel. This rhetorical emphasis fits in with Wilkinson's observation of colleges' shift from the language of charity to that of merit in the 1920s, as liberal individualism became increasingly dominant.¹³

According to the Society, its beneficiaries' academic success proved their worthiness to receive aid by demonstrating they were assets to the college at least as much as their wealthier peers. The importance placed on grades in distributing aid points to the increasing application of the meritocratic ideals and practices to middle-class women as well as their brothers. These ideals held that academic testing could detect the potential for future success, or "promise," and moreover that it was beneficial to society – and only fair – to allocate further educational resources to those who thus proved themselves. With the help of their training, the talented would give back to society through economic productivity and, as members of a technocratic elite, wise leadership and public service.¹⁴ As educated white women became public economic and political actors who competed in the marketplace, served as state bureaucrats, and participated in governance, they became subject to the meritocratic pressures to which they had been immune when they were confined to the private, noncompetitive, emotional world of the home. Even those women who chose public life under the banner of moral guardianship remained insulated from meritocratic standards, as Henry Fowle Durant's ban on students' being informed of their grades suggests. As discussed previously, according to earlier women reformers themselves, women's separation from the harsh competitive ideals of capitalism was what allowed them to preserve their moral superiority in the first place and legitimated their influence in the

public sphere. The Society's strong emphasis on scholarship, compared to its relative unimportance in documents of the 1880s and 1890s, shows just how far the Wellesley women of the 1920s, alumnae and students alike, had left behind the collectivist ideals of true womanhood in exchange for the meritocratic ideals of liberal bourgeois individualism. Instead of referring to gendered moral superiority, they justified women's participation in society, governance, and the economy on the grounds of the gender-neutral privileges and responsibilities to which all citizens had right.

However, the Society and its supporters were not merely concerned with students' individual academic success. They also placed a high value on participation in student activities and organizations, which they called "college citizenship." The phrase is apt, for it evokes the underlying concepts the Society felt such participation represented: willingness to cooperate for a shared goal, public-spiritedness, loyalty to Wellesley and affection for one's fellow students, and leadership potential. In fact, the Society claimed that the qualities of "character and personality" demonstrated by good college citizenship – *not* academic achievement – "give the fairest promise for most useful citizenship after leaving college."¹⁵ The concept of college citizenship thus reflected the idea that the college was a microcosm of American civil society, a training ground for participation in public life as an individual rights-bearing citizen. It was thus sharply distinct from the collective model of public service advocated by the Society's 19th century publications, which portrayed Wellesley women as participating in the public sphere only as interchangeable agents of a larger cause rather than conscientious, democratic citizens exercising their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. In the

1920s, women's participation in student government trained them to exercise their new-won right to vote, which for the first time recognized white women as fully enfranchised individual citizens rather than the inherent dependents of men.

The Society's leaders reassured their donors that women on financial aid had proved their worthiness as citizens as much as scholars, reporting, "in non-academic activities also, the Society has reason to be proud of the girls on its list." In 1924, ten served in important student government leaderships positions, and many others as captains of sports team, officers of societies and clubs, committee members, and contributors to the Press Board, *Legenda*, and *Wellesley News*.¹⁶ All in all, the Society assured readers that it found ample evidence to conclude that self-helpers were just as active and responsible college citizens as their peers, despite their greater burdens. One student contributor to the 1927 report proudly informed readers, "Yes, you can work and do excellently academically at the same time, and self-help girls often hold offices. One girl worked about 3 hours a day last year, held a position on the College News board, held a class position, made first hockey team, first gym team, and pitched for the class baseball team."¹⁷ (One wonders when she slept.) The Society's leaders offered these and other examples to prove to readers that their beneficiaries were just as well-equipped to compete as students, and thus as future economic actors, and as willing to participate as college citizens, and therefore as American citizens, as their full-tuition paying peers. This foundational premise supported their core argument for the need for their organization: that adequate financial aid was necessary to preserve meritocracy at Wellesley.

However, Paige and her colleagues went beyond arguing that preserving meritocracy at Wellesley – and by extension the College’s distinctive identity – necessitated supporting students on financial aid to claim that students on aid in particular expressed the highest fulfillment of Wellesley’s foundational principles. In 1921, Paige told donors, “The College must not lose the students whose appeals we bring to you today, and they must not lose the College, for no students could more thoroughly embody the Founder’s ‘one great true ideal of higher education’ for women, ‘the supreme development and unfolding of every power and faculty.’”^{*} Here, Paige’s argument subtly pivots away from the argument that financial aid students are worthy because of their *similarities* to wealthier peers – that they deserve support because, according to the principles of meritocracy, they have as much of a right to attend the college as wealthier peers by virtue of being just as accomplished – to one that finds less wealthy student’s worthiness in their *differences from* wealthier peers. Paige went so far as to argue that not aiding such students would rob the College of the students that best embodied its highest principles. She used a financial metaphor to compare the survival of the College’s special mission – to educate women to their greatest potential in all fields of endeavor – to its material survival, saying “we need buildings, we need, even more, adequate salaries for our instructors, but what should these gains avail if, at the same time, we should lose from our assets the right kind of girl coming year after year to Wellesley?”¹⁸ According to the Society’s organizers, less wealthy students not only

^{*} Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 11. Readers recalling the first chapter will note that by de-contextualizing Durant’s words, Paige somewhat misleadingly identifies the means (the liberal education of women) of his mission in founding Wellesley *as* his mission. In fact, the mission Paige advocates here is in keeping with that of the early 20th century College – which, as we have seen, actually evolved considerably away from that of the original College, which was evangelical social reform.

equaled their peers in objectively defined academic and extracurricular achievement – they also surpassed them in some less quantifiable but no less significant way, a way that made their presence essential to preserving the special spirit of the College. Unlike their wealthier peers, students on financial aid had to decide to sacrifice their own earnings in order attend Wellesley, proving to Society organizers that they had greater loyalty to the College than their peers and were more committed to its ideals of fully realized personal development.

The special characteristic that students on financial aid had that wealthier students lacked, the trait that showed they embodied these high ideals, was the one that defined them as self-helpers: in addition to studying and participating in extracurricular activities, they worked to pay for their education and personal support. Such efforts demonstrated not only the admirable personal responsibility suggested by the term “self-help” but also the extra level of commitment and effort the Society alluded to in its observation that “the student who cares enough for his college education to work for it” achieves more academically. Society organizers often pointed to the requirement that women on financial aid work to suggest that their accomplishments were thus all the more impressive. The Society’s leaders argued that “the academic results [of financial aid students] become yet more noteworthy” “when one consider that of the beneficiaries of the Society thus honored considerably more than half have given a part of every day to work for self-support in college.”¹⁹ The Society also alluded students’ considerable working hours to contextualize the efforts of less markedly high-achieving students. “The rest of our...girls” who had not received academic honors, wrote

Caswell, “are for the most part carrying their work at...thoroughly satisfactory [grades], and indeed quite as much as can rightly be expected of a group of girls who are all spending much time wage-earning.”²⁰

But in arguing for the special worthiness of financial aid students, paid work was far more important in itself than it was in merely accentuating the merit implied by academic achievement. Self-helpers exerted a significant amount of time and energy working for pay. This effort to earn money towards their own support in college, more than anything else, defined the women as self-helpers, and such work was a prerequisite for seeking aid from the Society. Work proved a woman a good investment for many reasons: it demonstrated her commitment to receiving an education, helped assure she could afford to complete it, suggested her ability to succeed in the market economy after graduation, and showed that she possessed classic capitalist values such as personal responsibility and a strong work ethic. The central importance of paid work during college in Society reports from the 1920s, as opposed to its complete absence from those of the 1890s, points to a dramatic shift in practical opportunities for women students and in the possibilities and ideals of white bourgeois womanhood. The proliferation of jobs appropriate for the “collegiette” suggests the increasing normalization of respectable women’s working and concomitant expanded life opportunities for white middle-class women workers.

The first college-educated women had paved the way for the graduates of the 1920s to enter the world of work through many more, and far easier, paths than previous generations. In the late 19th century, a few stubborn women had broken into

medicine, law, ministry, and academia, allowing others to follow; by the early 20th century, many others had worked together to invent and professionalize the fields of social work and nursing; by 1918, great masses of women seemed to have dragged the nation to the brink of granting them their right to vote. (They finally succeeded when Tennessee ratified the 19th Amendment on August 18, 1920.) It was no wonder that a sense of optimism pervaded campuses such as Wellesley's. As women's historian Barbara Miller Solomon explains, "[women] graduates coming out of colleges during and immediately after World War I took advantage of the increased opportunities with a sense of euphoria that there were no limits on what they could do."²¹ Though women still comprised a very small proportion of doctors (5 percent) and lawyers (1.4 percent) in 1920, those women who did break into these prestigious professions, along with academia and ministry, were most often alumnae of the elite northeastern women's colleges – colleges like Wellesley.²² Meanwhile, though women college graduates still earned little as teachers, they had firmly established themselves as the professional elite within the educational field and significantly bettered their salaries.²³ By the 1920s, many other women found attractive and readily available alternatives to teaching in social work, which was one of the only professions in which they could achieve significant leadership positions, or in business, where clerical or stenographic positions may provide them entrée into the wider commercial world.²⁴ It seems that this expansion in the kinds of occupational options available to women coincided with an expansion in the number of positions available to them: by 1920, women made up 44.1% of the professional labor force.²⁵ The "vigorous, vital economic growth" of the 1920s,

which saw full employment by 1924 and manifold business and technological innovations throughout, heightened the sense of optimism and further increased opportunities for white-collar women workers.²⁶

Not only did the graduates of the 1920s have more career options, they increasingly felt that they had more options in combining work with family life.²⁷ The first generation of college women believed, with good reason, that they could either work or marry and have children. Almost none did both. Only about half of Wellesley alumnae from the classes of 1884 through 1903 ever married, and those who did married later and had fewer children than other women. (Most of the post-incorporation Society leadership from the classes of 1890s, including President Paige, never married.) In contrast, the women whom this chapter principally concerns, the classes of 1920-1929, married more than eighty percent of the time.²⁸ Additionally, for the educated white women of 1920s, wanting to marry did not necessarily mean giving up paid work entirely: around ninety percent of women in the 1920-1929 cohort worked for pay for at least some part of their lives.²⁹ Though most alumnae gave up work after marriage or childbirth, a still small but growing and increasingly visible minority broke with bourgeois tradition to stay employed, igniting a passionate public debate about the morality and consequences of their choices that would flare up again and again throughout the 20th century.³⁰ Thus, though she was still greatly constrained in her life choices compared to a brother at Harvard, a Wellesley first-year entering in 1918 could expect to have a far wider range of options for both work and family when she graduated with the class of 1923 than a student twenty or forty years before could have

ever reasonably considered. No longer did working mean giving up family life for middle-class white women, encouraging more of them to try it for at least a time and reducing the opportunity costs associated with attending college.

Just as post-collegiate job opportunities expanded for educated women, so did term-time and summer job opportunities for women students. This development must have been a godsend for less wealthy women, no longer left helpless to pay for their own educations because working was incompatible with bourgeois respectability. But at the Society, students' opportunity to work became an obligation to work. Losing the status of dependent and gaining the opportunity to act as an individual in the public sphere also meant gaining the responsibility to provide for oneself. The Society would help only she who helped herself. "Self-helpers" thus had to work if they wanted to stay at Wellesley and have adequate funds for their needs and wants; though the Society sometimes provided grants that allowed seniors to reduce their hours or stop working entirely, it only did so for students its leaders believed had worked exceptionally hard in previous years. Yet Society publications largely obfuscated the practical financial need behind students' work during college, especially in the personal accounts by working students it published in its annual reports. In the pages of Society publications, self-helpers did not describe their work as a mere necessity, drudgery to be dutifully borne, but as a meaningful and enjoyable educational experience. Though this emphasis on the joy of work over its practical importance surely reflected students' and Society organizers' wish to reassure future students and Wellesley parents that one could work and still enjoy one's time in college, it also suggests that the relationship

between working for self-support and maintaining a normative middle-class female identity was still fraught and problematic in the 1920s – particularly in a college setting.

As the respectable social roles available to white middle-class women expanded and life outcomes for educated women became more diverse, the purpose and experience of college changed as an increasingly large number of young women clamoring to attend. The social meaning of women’s higher education had evolved from training for selfless public service, respectable but non-normative, to a highly valued stage in a normative life course. Previously reserved for women committed to sacrificing family life for a chance to serve the public good, by the 1920s, for the growing middle classes, college had become a rite of passage between childhood and adulthood for not just boys but increasingly for girls. As it became ever more obvious that college was no longer the exclusive province of spinsters eking out a noble, lonely living as schoolteachers, women surged into higher education. By 1920, they had approached parity with their male counterparts, making up 47.3% of all college students.³¹ As historian Barbara Solomon explains, “In the nineteenth century going to college had been an unusual and complicated choice for native white women. By 1900 these female collegians were no longer regarded as social rebels... While popular magazines featured the glamour of college life, guidebooks helped parents and daughters choose the right school. By World War I” – when this chapter begins – “college was a very important option to provide a daughter with in some circles, and outside those circles, it was something to aspire to.”³²

Some believed that the popularization of women's education was leading to its dilution—or degradation. As Hackett cynically puts it, during “America's boom years,” “in place of the earnest pioneers of early years in women's colleges came a flood of young people” — “lured by enticing pictures of college life, the expectation of social advancement, or just because everyone else was going” — who were “looking to have a good time first, education second.”³³ Whether or not it's fair to blame youthful dilettantes for weakening moral and intellectual seriousness on American college campuses, it is clear that in the 1920s, at Wellesley as elsewhere, students participated enthusiastically in the vibrant, rebellious, and showy youth culture of the period and devoted an increasing amount of time to having a good time, or fighting for the right to do so.³⁴ After dramatic struggles with the administration and the faculty, College Government struck down many rules requiring students to be chaperoned off-campus and won them the right to smoke openly on campus.³⁵ Responding to the nascent dating culture of the period, students showed a conspicuous interest in socializing with men on and off campus, and many of the traditional all-female events and dances waned in popularity.³⁶ In a development that would have horrified the Durants, pleasure, freedom, and romance had taken their place alongside scholarship, piety, and moral development in the priorities of Wellesley women. Hackett offers this vivid portrait of 1920s Wellesley students as stylish, pleasure-seeking, independent, and even a little vain:

Every Saturday saw a big exodus — to football games, house parties at men's colleges, excursions to Boston to see [plays]. Everybody had to go to Quincy to see *Strange Interlude*,* which had been banished from Boston proper. In their

* A 1923 Eugene O'Neill play concerning the highly controversial subjects of adultery and abortion.

short, very long-waisted dresses and tight little hats that came down over their ears, hiding their permanent waves, rather overindulgent in make-up and colored fingernails, students sometimes insisted on smoking on the train platform, much to the distress of [train line] employees.³⁷

Even if exaggerated by Hackett's nostalgia, this vision illustrates the extent to which pleasure, consumption, and a carefree approach to life had come to define collegiate identity and experience, even at Wellesley College. This idyllic and expensive model of college life left little imaginative room for working for pay, scrimping, or saving. Even though Wellesley provided varied job opportunities to students and all self-help students, who made up a significant percentage of those enrolled, worked at least part of their time at college, the idealized Wellesley identity and experience did not include working for pay. Wellesley women took pride in their college's academic rigor, their enthusiasm for participating in student organizations and activities, their devoted friendships, and their idiosyncratic traditions – not in their classmates' hard work at hourly jobs. For example, in the self-deprecating song "The Wellesley Composite," the protagonist, representing a typical, or composite portrait of, a Wellesley student, bemoans her distaste for examinations and mathematics and affection for sports, trips to Boston, and illicit late night snacking.³⁸

The way in which paid work conflicted with the "bright college years" ideal left the Society with a conundrum. It was important to show financial aid students to be self-helpers, but emphasizing paid work distinguished them from their wealthier peers, whose experiences set the norms of college life, and thus problematized their Wellesley community membership, which, as discussed previously, was also essential in defining them as worthy to receive aid. The Society's leaders attempted to resolve this tension

by obfuscating the practical ends of students' work and playing up the pleasures, friendships, and personal growth student workers experienced, in effect recasting employment as just another part of the adventurous college experience. To achieve this, the Society's organizers turned to students they aided to provide cheerful tales of working life for the edification of their readers.

The manifold delights of paid work fill the pages of the Society's 1927 report in particular. That year, the Society commissioned ten students to write about their experiences earning in hopes that such accounts would "both help girls who are planning to come to college, and entertain their elders, while at the same time showing convincingly that the Wellesley Spirit flourishes today in all its pristine vigor." The Society further explained that work was beneficial to students themselves too: "the personal experiences of a number of students who have tried to make money during college and in the summer are the best testimonies that the work is not only financially profitable but often enlargening to the girls' horizons, and is a genuine pleasure to them."³⁹ Besides proclaiming what fun they had, the writers represented work as part of their playful "bright college years" by recounting amusing stories of eccentric employers and ingenious and original money-making schemes, such as cutting hair and selling daffodils shipped north from the family farm before Massachusetts' first spring bloom.⁴⁰

For any kind of work a girl could possibly do at Wellesley, the students who wrote for the Society could find a reason why it was satisfying, meaningful, and fun. It seems that most would have agreed with A.R, class of 1928, who claimed, "Making

money is just as interesting and thrilling as spending money at Wellesley – and much more profitable.”⁴¹ Even the most banal tasks are portrayed as a cheerful lark. Writing on the joys of “washing dishes for an ex-faculty member who has a wonderful store of information on almost any subject,” one student explained, “While you wash and she dries you talk about everything from going west in covered wagon, or birthday party tricks to the inconsistencies of materialism.”⁴² Answering the door for the College President was not only a “privilege,” but also earned the writer the reward of “a dish of delicious ice cream and cake” with Miss Pendleton herself. Checking coats and ushering were “diversions” that earned one free access to special cultural events: “As we put it, we were paid to see Pi Eta and the Williams play.”⁴³ One student even explained her decision to take on many casual jobs rather than a single steady one in terms of her enjoyment of them: “All these odd jobs brought interesting variety after the first novelty of earning any money at all had worn off, and so were always lots of fun.”⁴⁴

All of the writers seem to have felt that, as one put it, that work “pays in more way than one.” Besides earning money and having a good time, they developed meaningful personal relationships, gained useful work experience and a greater sense of self-efficacy, and deepened their worldly knowledge. As A.L.W. '29 put it, “Earning money is an enthralling and adventurous experience. The mere thought of it creates an atmosphere of importance and self-sufficiency.” For example, one student who worked in a bank highly valued the professional skills and personal satisfaction she gained: “I not only earned a hundred dollars but gained much practical knowledge and personal independence...My jobs have taught me how to go about getting a job, ...how to talk

with professional men and women, as well as the definite practical knowledge I acquired. I worked hard, but I had fun, too." As a result of the experience, she wrote, "I'm looking forward to a real permanent job within the next year or so." In emphasizing the moral and educational rather than pecuniary rewards of their work, the students, consciously or not, recast their experiences of work in terms familiar and acceptable to bourgeois readers who might not have any firsthand experience of relatively unskilled and low-status labor. This was true even when the work student did was very similar, or even identical to, the work done by actual working-class people. A.L.W., who worked as a factory laborer, recast her experience as an opportunity to gain insight into urgent social problems rather than merely to get paid:

[At a candy factory,] I found out so much about the once much-adored sweets that I never felt the same toward them since. The other was a shirt and waist factory that presented a very sad and discouraging picture of the struggle between capital and labor. The employers employed mere children, and cheated the workers at every turn. The employees talked disloyalty and walked off with shirts hidden beneath their own clothes.

She concluded, "These experiences, though unfortunate at surface valuation, did teach me much."⁴⁵ The money she earned and her potential personal difficulties with the exploitative owners seem to have been beside the point, at least in the story she tells her middle-class readers.

For many girls, another important immaterial reward of work was the relationships and sense of responsibility to others it engendered. M.R. '27 placed a special value on such bonds, writing, "I think one of the greatest rewards which makes the money value of your work come second – is the opportunity of knowing the people you work for." She took pride in assisting her employers: "If you have the good fortune

to be a secretary...of a busy person, there is the joy of feeling you are, in some way, lightening a burden which without you might otherwise be heavy." Similarly, another student who waited tables at the establishments of two different women recalled, "It was impossible for me to know these women as intimately as I did without taking a personal interest in their establishments...It is this 'inside interest' which I find the most interesting and the most wearying part of waiting on table. Yet I cannot imagine working satisfactorily without it."⁴⁶ Students portrayed the employer-employee relationship not as economic but as a close personal relationship. Work was transformed from a self-interested instrumental activity into a form of personally fulfilling social participation that contributed to the harmony of society. As one student wrote about working on campus, "Like the great world, this little one has many needs, which any girls who feels she must earn part of her expenses can fill, and fill with satisfaction and joy."⁴⁷ These visions of employment as a social bond, work as a contribution to larger harmonious order and a path to personal fulfillment expresses the model of self and society traced in *The Soul's Economy*, historian Jeffrey Sklansky's influential intellectual history of the rise of capitalism in the United States, once again illustrating the extent to which gender-neutral models of individualism had reshaped white middle-class women's identities and experiences.⁴⁸

The Society's organizers' editorial choices and students' rhetorical choices to emphasize the joys and immaterial rewards of work in order to fit it into an idyllic vision of higher education as the stage for fun and personal development normalized such students' experiences within the bourgeois model of higher education. They

attempted to secure their middle-class identities from any doubts raised by their work as waitresses, factory workers, and dishwashers. Leaving out the struggles and deadly serious purpose of paid work for both themselves and their fellow workers, writers drew from their experiences of blue-collar labor rewards typically more associated with white-collar work: enhanced skills and knowledge, personal fulfillment, responsibility, and independence. They transmuted working-class labor into quasi-professional work, or at least preparation for it, thus further reasserting and defending their class status from the potential contamination of lower-status work experience. Nevertheless, such reinterpretation of work as educational, pleasurable, or fulfilling was not always enough to fully shield students from the shadow of lower class status.

In order to underline the assertion that though financial aid students may have *visited* the working-class world, they were not *of* it, the writers' accounts often include workplace cross-class encounters that emphasize the differences between the middle-class protagonist and her less refined co-workers. Writers cast themselves as tourists or anthropologists reporting back to middle-class peers, not as representatives of typical workers in the fields in which they were employed. A.L.W.'s account of her experience working in factories provides the best examples, especially because her work was the farthest from anything that could be considered professional. Her concerned yet detached description of the abuses she witnessed places her firmly outside – and above – the class tensions that engendered them. Despite her presence on the shop floor, she is a neutral observer rather than a participant in conflicts between “capital and labor,” rendering these tensions in highly academic terms (perhaps learned in a

Wellesley lecture hall). Similarly, while discussing her first job at a different factory, A.L.W. explicitly contrasts herself with her coworkers: "To me the work was new and high adventure," but "to the regular workers it was ten long hours of monotony – the din of noises and bosses' voices." These other workers, A.L.W. recalled, unexpectedly built her confidence in her college dreams. When she left her job to return to high school, she feared telling her coworkers that she had been working toward putting herself through college, but "instead of laughing at such an idea, they were thoroughly sympathetic and encouraging, said they thought it was a great goal, and sent me forth with well wishes and higher ideals than I had ever entertained before."⁴⁹

This story can be read as an assertion that even A.L.W.'s coworkers recognized her distinction from them. It is a moment not of solidarity but of homage to middle-class values in the most unlikely of places, and it further contrasts the future collegian with the lifelong laborers. Fittingly, A.L.W.'s account of her work experiences ends with what she called her "modern story of the Fairy Godmother," in which her class status is once again recognized and celebrated despite her low-status work. While working as a "floor girl" in a tearoom that served "an interesting and absorbed professional class which appreciated service and efficiency," A.L.W. encountered "a family of three, proud and very fastidious, who came daily to the place, and avoided my tables because I was 'new.'" But, she reported, "One a day a sudden change appeared. They sought my tables and made up with deference for their former aloof and conscious indifference." Why? "The manager had asked them how they liked his new floor-girl from *Wellesley!*"⁵⁰ In effect, the family recognized A.L.W. as one of their own. With the magic

word “Wellesley,” the manager had transformed her, Cinderella-like, from a working-class servant girl into a bourgeois princess.

In sharing these students’ cheerful accounts of work and bourgeois identity preserved and celebrated in unlikely settings, the Society warded off uncertainty about self-helpers’ class status while simultaneously illustrating the great efforts they made to finance their own education, thereby proving their worthiness to receive aid on two counts. By normalizing students’ unconventional experiences, this balancing act presented self-helpers as uniquely needy *and* wholly of the Wellesley community. These girls, the Society implicitly argued, were only superficially different from their wealthier peers. They shared the same values, points of view, and general collegiate experiences of fun, self-exploration, and personal development (even if they found them in work rather than purely in recreational and extracurricular activities). Just like A.L.W., underneath the aprons and smocks they donned for work, they too were anointed daughters of the middle-class. By giving to the Society, alumnae could become Fairy Godmothers themselves, ensuring that these worthy young women would not labor in the cinders for naught but instead claim their rightful place at Wellesley College and then in the bourgeois professional classes.

But though the Society’s leaders claimed that there were no substantive status differences between women on financial aid and those who did not need it, qualitative and quantitative evidence of socioeconomic inequality on campus from their own documents belies that assertion. In 1921, the Society played up Wellesley’s supposed egalitarianism and inclusivity, claiming that financial aid students “enjoy social equality

in the student body” and “are members of societies and organizations scarcely less than other students.” It quoted one self-help student, who advised, “I somehow feel very strongly that Wellesley is the one college that will give [a young woman] just what she needs, a chance to be a part of a small democracy where very little matters except what you are personally.”⁵¹ But even if students ignored socioeconomic status when judging their peers on an individual basis, students on financial aid reported real and tangible differences in their social experiences compared to those of their peers, all caused by their lack of financial resources. The central importance of socializing, recreation, and entertainment in 1920s student life magnified the importance of these differences. For example, contrary to the Society’s claim in 1921, their 1925 study comparing the spending of students who received aid and those who did not found that the former participated in student activities at about half the rate of their wealthier counterparts, most likely because they could not spare as much money for dues and or as much time on literally unprofitable activities. Several students on aid did not participate in any organizations, while all non-aid students joined at least one. Clearly it was simply untrue that students on financial aid were “members of societies and organizations scarcely less than other students.” Similarly, on average students receiving aid spent a third as much on amusements – e.g. plays, movies, restaurant meals, train fare into Boston, on campus Proms (formal dances) – as their better-off peers.⁵² Not only did this disparity deprive students of opportunities to enjoy themselves, it also limited their social opportunities. For example, in explaining the advantages of living in a cooperative dorm with other students on aid, one student reported, “In the other

dormitories it isn't so easy to economize, for of course you want to do what the other girls do, and of course you must pay your fair share."⁵³ Similarly, joining the societies—ostensibly devoted to philosophy, the fine arts, and so on, but actually quasi-sororities offering exclusive social opportunities—put new demands on students' budgets.⁵⁴ In the highly charged social atmosphere of the 1920s college, participating in such formal and informal activities was extremely important to many students. The Society's student informant reported, "to some [the Proms] mean a great deal of happiness, and many girls prefer to cut to the last degree on other things rather than here."⁵⁵ Even travelling into the city to attend a house party at a men's college, as the glamorous students Hackett depicted waiting for the train on Saturday night planned to do, was not affordable for many students on aid because of the cost of train fare.

Thus, as the exploding consumer economy and expanding opportunities for young women to socialize freely with each other and with men offered their wealthier peers a vast array of options to enjoy themselves and amass social capital, many students on financial aid were comparably left behind. Given how the cost of college citizenship and an active social life limited students on aid from participating in formal and informal social activities, it seems unlikely substantive social equality, measured in terms of voluntary social interaction among women with different financial means and opportunities to participate in similar social events, could have existed on campus, even if no one actively discriminated against their less wealthy peers.

As explored throughout this chapter, in the 1920s, the Students' Aid Society argued for the worthiness of their cause and their beneficiaries not by portraying them

as charity cases or recruits in for the cause of evangelical social reform but as individual middle-class women identical to their wealthier peers in all important aspects. As the Society saw it, self-helpers deserved all the opportunities Wellesley had to offer by virtue of their exemplary performance of middle-class values, in particular illustrated by their efforts to work for pay. Their presence at the College reaffirmed its commitment to meritocracy. Larger cultural forces profoundly shaped the values of the Society and the College reflected in these portrayals of self-helpers. Unlike the students of the 1880s and 1890s, those of the 1920s could participate in public and economic life in many roles other than as Christian teachers or crusading social workers. The purpose of educating women, at Wellesley and in the U.S. as a whole, shifted away from preparing them to “minister unto” the world toward preparing them – at least in theory – to participate in it as middle-class citizens and economic actors. Middle-class white women left the threshold from which they had regarded the chaotic, competitive, and capitalist world to venture into its streets, offices, and voting booths. For the first time, they emerged as individuals and came under similar meritocratic pressures as their brothers. The standards of scholarship and college citizenship applied to Society applicants and the values attributed to them illustrate this profound shift very clearly. The Society no longer heralded the special nation-redeeming mission of women, especially its beneficiaries, but discussed them as individuals whose personal success, rather than service to a cause, would prove them good investments.

At the same time, the Society’s implicit defenses of self-helpers’ class status, so apparent in students’ accounts of working life, reflect the incomplete transition in

conceptions of white middle-class womanhood. The emphasis on fun, personal fulfillment, and training in professional skills and the class distinctions drawn between the girls and their coworkers suggest that it was still discomfited some readers to think that a white middle-class girl would work at a lower-status job, even to pay for college. Similarly, Society's discovery that self-helpers could not, in fact, participate as much in student life because of their financial limitations undermined its claim that Wellesley offered absolute democracy and equality of opportunity to all students. The Society tried to reduce these inequalities by aiding students in hopes that they could work less or afford to participate more fully, but its funds were never adequate to wipe away the financial, if not class, distinctions that persisted on campus. As much the Society insisted that its girls were same as all other Wellesley women and that they embodied the true spirit of the College, the very need for the Society's existence testified that this could not be true.

¹ Samuel Smiles, "Chapter I—Self-Help—National and Individual," in *Self Help, with Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (E-book: Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org), 1997 [1859]), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/selfh10h.htm>.

² H.C.G. Matthew, "Smiles, Samuel (1812–1904)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, May 2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36125?docPos=1>.

³ Smiles, "Chapter 1," *Self-Help*.

⁴ Rupert Wilkinson, "Merit and 'Self-Help'", *Aiding Students, Buying Students: Financial Aid in America* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 97-110.

⁵ Abbie L. Paige, Elizabeth Seelman Kingsley, and Mary Caswell, *Report of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Incorporated, for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1920*, Wellesley

College Bulletin, 10 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, March 1921), Wellesley College Archives, 12.

⁶ Abbie L. Paige and Ruby Willis, *Report of the Officers of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Inc., for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1924*, Wellesley College Bulletin, 14 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, January 1925), Wellesley College Archives, 15.

⁷ Mary Caswell, "Letter to Officers of the College requesting their assistance in assessing aid applicants," May 19, 1923, Wellesley College Archives.

⁸ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 5.

⁹ Abbie L. Paige, Elizabeth Seelman Kingsley, and Mary Caswell, *Report of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Incorporated, for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1922*, Wellesley College Bulletin, 12 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, April 1923), Wellesley College Archives, 11-12.

¹⁰ Paige & Willis, 1925, 33-34.

¹¹ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 6-7.

¹² Abbie L. Paige, *Report of the Officers of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Inc., for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1926 with Ten Stories of Girls Who Earn*, Wellesley College Bulletin, 16 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, May 1927), Wellesley College Archives, 27.

¹³ Wilkinson, "Merit and 'Self Help,'" *Aiding Students, Buying Students*.

¹⁴ See Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: the Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

¹⁵ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1923, 3.

¹⁶ Paige & Willis, 1925, 17.

¹⁷ Paige, 1927, 9.

¹⁸ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 12.

¹⁹ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 6-7.

²⁰ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1923, 3.

²¹ Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 174.

²² Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 127, Table 5.

²³ Barbara Sicherman, "College and Careers: Historical Perspectives on the Lives and Work Patterns of Female College Graduates," in *Women and Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, ed. John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe, 1st ed (New York: Norton, 1988), 149

²⁴ Sicherman, "College and Careers," 155.

²⁵ Rudolph C. Blitz, "Women in the Professions, 1870-1970," *Monthly Labor Review* 97, no. May (1974): 35.

²⁶ Gene Smiley, "The U.S. Economy in the 1920s," *EH.Net Encyclopedia* (Economic History Association, March 26, 2008), <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/Smiley.1920s.final>.

²⁷ Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Chapter 10, "The First Modern College Women."

²⁸ Helene Kazanjian Sergeant, *A Summary of Replies to the Wellesley Alumnae Questionnaire* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, 1964), Wellesley College Archives.

²⁹ Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 123.

³⁰ Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Chapter 11, "A Public Debate for College Women."

³¹ Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 62.

³² Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 77.

³³ Hackett, *Wellesley*, 229-30.

³⁴ For more on student life at women's college during this period, see Courtney Weiner, "Her Side of Paradise: The Seven Sisters Schools and Youth Culture in the 1920s" (Thesis, B.A., Princeton University, 2001). For more on women's romantic and sexual lives in particular see Florence Mae Waldron, "Placing Men on Women's Campuses: The Social Lives and Dating Patterns of Students at Mount Holyoke, Smith and Wellesley Colleges Based on Their Letters Home, 1900-1965" (Thesis, B.A., American Studies, Williams College, 1995).

³⁵ Hackett, *Wellesley*, 218-220, 242-3.

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- ³⁶ See Stephanie Coontz, "'The Time When Mountains Move Has Come': From Sentimental to Sexual Marriage," *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2006), Hackett, Wellesley, 242-4.
- ³⁷ Hackett, Wellesley, 242.
- ³⁸ Lottie Evelyn Bates, "The Wellesley Composite (c. 1901)," in *Song Book* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Alumnae Association, 2007), 18-22.
- ³⁹ Paige, 1927, 8.
- ⁴⁰ Abbie L. Paige and Ruby Willis, *Report of the Officers of the Wellesley Students' Aid Society, Inc., for the Fiscal Year Ending August 31, 1925*, Wellesley College Bulletin, 15 (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, May 1926), Wellesley College Archives, 30.
- ⁴¹ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 13.
- ⁴² Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 8.
- ⁴³ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 14.
- ⁴⁴ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 11.
- ⁴⁵ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 19.
- ⁴⁶ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 22.
- ⁴⁷ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 18.
- ⁴⁸ Jeffrey P. Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- ⁴⁹ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 19.
- ⁵⁰ Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 19.
- ⁵¹ Paige, Kingsley, & Caswell, 1921, 9.
- ⁵² Willis & Paige, 1925, 27, 31.
- ⁵³ Willis & Paige, 1925, 29.
- ⁵⁴ Kingsley & Caswell, 1923, 11.
- ⁵⁵ Kingsley & Caswell, 1923, 10.

CONCLUSION

Non Ministrari? Wellesley Women Imagine Themselves



Fig. 5. Students from Massachusetts elected House Presidents for the year 1927-8 at Wellesley.
Left to right: Lois Whitaker, Shafer; Priscilla Wentworth, Tower; Eleanor Noyes, Beebe.
Wellesley College Archives Image Gallery.

There are three women I've never met, Wellesley alumnae all, without whom this project would have been impossible: Florence Morse Kingsley, Florence Converse, and Alice Payne Hackett. That is not just because, or even chiefly because, of the rich factual information they provide about the College's history from its earliest days. Each of the three writers comes from different Wellesley generations – the pre-1881 Durant rule, the reformist 1890s, and the modernized 1920s – and thus unknowingly flavors her narrative with the distinctive concerns and ideals of her own “golden college years.” Nostalgia for whatever prevailed in her own undergraduate career sometimes provokes a writer to an implied sigh when she must describe what has been lost or changed. Yet all alike insist that Wellesley College, no matter how much it has changed – regardless of the loss of Silent Time, domestic work, College Hall itself – still fulfills essentially the same mission as it did in 1876, or 1893, or 1924. To illustrate her claim, Hackett, on the last pages of her work, quotes longtime Durant and Society secretary Mary Caswell, who imagines what Henry Fowle Durant would say if he could visit College in 1923:

“I am very glad to see your material advance. It is most gratifying. I must say, however, that there are some little things that I do not like. Perhaps you could get on without them. Perhaps they have uses that I do not yet understand. But there are some things I must know. Tell me,” and those wonderful eyes would glow from their depths, “is the college motto, Not to be ministered unto, but to minister! still an active force?...Does the poor girl have her full chance?...Assure me that these things are so and I do not mind the rest quite so much.”¹

For a historian, these questions are not so simply answered as they were for Hackett and Caswell, who replied with an unqualified yes. By the 1920s, the means by which Durant hoped to produce women who would minister unto – that is, by forming them into a collective of noble Christian teachers leading the charge for Protestant-

capitalist socioeconomic order under the banner of women's moral authority – had been dismantled utterly by successive generations of Wellesley women. From the 1880s on, white middle-class women unsettled the gender-essentialist assumptions underlying the ideology of women's benevolence and argued that women deserved a space in the public sphere simply because of their universal individual rights, not the collective moral authority tied to their gender. Instead of constructing its beneficiaries as bourgeois crusaders for Christ and capitalism as it had in the Durant heyday of the 1870s-1890s, the revived Students' Aid Society portrayed them as plucky citizen-subjects fulfilling the key moral imperative of the middle-class and of the capitalist political economy: self-help. In 1878, the student on aid had to pledge herself to serve others to prove herself worthy of aid; in 1928, she had to devote herself to her own support, now and after graduation, to do the same.

The selflessness and collectivism implied by Durant's original "*sed ministrare*" had been supplanted by a reconfiguring of the motto that recast any productive effort, even that only directly contributed to one's own well-being, as a service to the community and nation as a whole. Just as President Pendleton said the mission of education was "above all" to teach the student to "[work] hard in whatever kind of endeavor his lot may be cast," and a 1920s self-helper told her peers, "Like the great world, this little one [Wellesley] has many needs, which any girls who feels she must earn part of her expenses can fill, and fill with satisfaction and joy" when discussing student job opportunities, Wellesley women re-imagined the world as a harmonious economic order, and themselves as free economic agents.² This worldview redefined

mere economic productivity as ministry unto the world. Granted the right to vote, Wellesley were – at least in theory – now full participants in the new national social, economic, and political order created by corporate capitalism instead of it handmaidens and missionaries. Did they still “minister unto” society? They believed they did, but they did not do so under Durant’s original, more literal, understanding of the phrase. The women of the 1920s also violated the first part of Durant’s commandment – not to be ministered unto – but after all so had the women of the 1870s, when he still reigned supreme. Simply by accepting the identities designed for them by the College’s leaders, whether as Christian teachers, self-helpers, citizens, or professionals, and complying with policies and rhetoric that communicated and enforced them, students were inarguably being “ministered unto.”

What did they lose when one identity replaced another? What imaginative and experiential possibilities faded when the self-helper replaced the Christian teacher? The movement from collectivism to individualism, gender difference to gender neutrality offered students prodigious new personal freedoms, but it also inhibited the powerful gender solidarity and potential for non-electoral political influence white middle class women shared in the 19th century. Intense female friendships became stigmatized as girls turned their attention to heterosexual courting and marriage. The opportunity to work in the professions redirected the ambitious away from social work, and the opportunity to reshape the social order, to the opportunity to participate in the economy as an autonomous agent. The undermining of female solidarity and social mission presented particular problems for the less wealthy girls by accentuating the

differences from their peers and problematizing their class status. As the collegiate experience became more about pleasure, personal development, and consumption than service and moral and intellectual exertion, those who couldn't keep up seemed more out of place and felt the creeping anxiety of status loss. As described by the Student Aid Society's own documents, the need to finance the "unnecessary" expenditures that made a social life possible pushed self-helpers spend more time at work, ironically marking them as even more different from more leisured peers. For these less wealthy students, the *ability* to work associated with the expansion in women's individual rights became the *imperative* to work. Thus, though the Students' Aid Society and the College itself did sincerely attempt to give "the poor girl" her fair chance, the structural constraints under which she lived at Wellesley prevented Durant's wish from being fully granted.

There was something else lost too, as the old collectivist College regime gave way to the individualist program, something that would not have concerned Durant but may be of interest to us as contemporary readers. Middle-class white women, in trading their collective moral authority for universal individual rights, ironically lost both some of the freedoms they had forged from their own constraints and the potential to create solidarities across lines of class and race. To win freedom, they had to conform to normative models of family life – i.e. marry, devote themselves to domesticity – and to defend the privileges granted to them from the poor, the immigrants, the people of color they had once tried to assist and reform in the settlement houses. Even though much of middle-class white women reformers' activity supported the interests of their

class, there were many women who found in their faith and their liberal educations reasons to support the claims of the marginalized people they were trying to assist against their oppressors. By the 1920s Wellesley women like Professor Vida Scudder, educated at Smith, happily unmarried, possibly lesbian, open socialist, settlement house pioneer, fiery labor advocate, continual target of furious newspapers calling for her resignation over her pro-labor views,³ had become relics – much to their despair. It would be decades before Wellesley women would once again question the role ministered unto them by the College and their society and re-imagine themselves as something else, something yet freer to behave as they wished, but yet also freer to cross lines of class and race to remake the social order instead of merely inhabiting it.

¹ Mary Caswell, qtd. in Hackett, *Wellesley College*, 304.

² Qtd. in Paige, 1927, 18.

³ Hackett, *Wellesley College*, 184-190.

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