

The Douglass Century: Transformation of the Women's College at Rutgers University**Eds. Keyo Denda, Mary Hawkesworth, Fernanda Perrone****New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018****352 pages****ISBN: 0813585414****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v5i1.177>**

In the last chapter of *The Douglass Century*, the authors note that, according to recent surveys, only 3-4% of young women today would consider attending a women's college. Women are now also 21 percent more likely than men to be college graduates and 48 percent more likely to have completed graduate school. These statistics speak to the success of the individuals and institutions who have supported women's education over the years even as they suggest a more precarious existence for women's colleges in the 21st century. Keyo Denda, Mary Hawkesworth, and Fernanda Perrone present a meticulously researched book that lays out the significance of what is today known as Douglass Residential College and its remarkable ability to adapt, not always evenly or perfectly, to the changing historical circumstances of the last one hundred years.

Founded in 1918 as the New Jersey College for Women (NJC), the institution quickly faced two questions that would define its existence: What are the goals of a college serving women and what relationship would this college have with Rutgers? The narrative is largely chronological, and the beautifully illustrated text adds visual impact to the changing history of the institution. Most of the chapters begin and end with a description of key events and developments which are useful for navigating the history, although at times it does create more of a textbook feel to the volume. The book begins by recounting how, in 1911, the New Jersey State Federation of Women's Clubs took up the challenge to create higher education opportunities for women in a state which lagged well behind the rest of the country in this effort. Its first dean, Mabel Smith Douglass, is presented as a force to be reckoned with, politically savvy and incredibly adept at fundraising in a contentious climate that sometimes meant minimizing issues of women's suffrage

and the “unhealthy competition between the sexes” that characterized coeducation. At the same time, NJC’s commitment to higher education for women was evident in the efforts of its early administration, a faculty that was 60% women by the end of the 1920s, and the students themselves who persistently challenged many of the strict rules regarding their behavior.

The college perilously navigated the years of the Great Depression which threatened enrollment and future job opportunities for women. The return to traditional gender roles in the 1950s provided renewed challenges, not to mention the creation of a Bride’s Course, as the college wrestled again with the contradictions of women’s traditional role and higher education for women. In 1955, the New Jersey College for Women became Douglass College, holding “quasi-independent status” within an expanding state university. The college continued to emphasize academic excellence and established the first program in the nation that allowed “older women” to attend college by establishing support through Bunting scholars and allowing for part-time matriculation.

By the 1960s, the experiences and cultural identity of the college were gradually altered through greater diversity of its students and coeducation in the classroom experience. Reorganization and greater centralization at Rutgers, including the founding of Livingston College as a co-educational institution, the establishment of Cook College located adjacent to Douglass, and the removal of many key departments through the creation of a separate School of Creative and Performing Arts (later Mason Gross), further challenged Douglass’s mission and place within the university. In the 1970s Douglass remodeled itself as “a college with a unique feminist identity;” ultimately receiving national and international acclaim for its women’s studies and leadership programs. The college continues to support its mission of leadership and education for women in its current iteration as Douglass Residential College.

The truly standout moments in this history are manifest in the complexity and competing opinions of the school's various stakeholders. Acknowledging the early years of the college were characterized by "nativism, anti-Semitism, and snobbery," the authors chronicle the challenges of creating an inclusive campus, providing an entire chapter focused on the issue of "diversifying Douglass." Excerpts from the reports of student organizations, as well as interviews and statements from past students throughout the book, give particular voice to the way in which Douglass women, at different times, variously defended or chafed at aspects of the "special mission" of the women's college.

This well-researched book honors the impact of Douglass on the history of New Jersey and on the many young women who attended the institution over the last one hundred years. More significantly, *The Douglass Century* provides a thoughtful sense of the struggle women faced as they sought access to higher education and, as important as ever, the continuing challenges women face achieving leadership roles and equity in today's society.

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