Conference Addresses State of The Planet

By Jill Stoddard

Engineers, ecologists, scientists, doctors and policymakers convened at the Earth Institute’s biannual conference, State of the Planet, March 29-30, to address the most urgent needs for investment in the areas of energy, food, water and health, especially in developing nations. “The central problem of this century is to raise the poor to an endurable standard of living without wrecking the planet,” said E.O. Wilson, Pellegrino University Professor of Zoology at Harvard University and recipient of the National Medal of Science and the Pulitzer Prize in literature. “Fortunately, this problem can be solved. The resources exist, the cost isn’t high, and the benefits are beyond calculation.” Wilson added that our civilization will be remembered “not only because we created, but because we refused to destroy.”

The diverse group of State of the Planet speakers, panelists and attendees shared Wilson’s sense of urgency and his optimism, resolving that rich nations must be responsible for helping the poorest parts of the world evolve healthy economies, not only because it is morally right, but because the planet is headed toward catastrophe on its current path.

Sponsored by Nova, Merck, the Ford Foundation, the New York Times, the National Geographic Society, and Praxair, the two-day State of the Planet conference was part of Columbia’s 250th anniversary celebration. At the Earth Institute’s two-day conference was part of Columbia’s 250th anniversary celebration.

Columbia’s Early History Explored in Lecture by Kenneth T. Jackson

By Peter Kolod

A series of four history lectures celebrating Columbia’s 250th anniversary began with an intellectual bang on April 7 with a provocative presentation by Kenneth T. Jackson, Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences. The central issue of his talk, “The University and the City: Columbia and New York From the Civil War to the Progressive Era,” was that through most of its history Columbia “has seen New York as more of a problem than an opportunity.”

Jackson began, appropriately enough for a Columbia 250 event, by waxing eloquent about the University’s longevity: “There is much to celebrate. In 1784, there was no such place as the United States, and George Washington was an unknown young man from Virginia. There was no grid system in New York City, no police force and no regular water supply. Two hundred and fifty years is a long time.”

But after eulogizing the University’s storied history and giving due credit to Barnard history professor and panel moderator Robert McCaughy for his seminal work on the University, Staud, Columbia, he returned to his main assertion, which was that “for large periods of its history, Columbia did not keep pace with New York City.”

He said that when King’s College was founded in 1745, “New York was not an impressive place.” But between 1784, when King’s College was rechartered as Columbia College, and 1854, “New York became the unrivaled metropolis of the Western Hemisphere. It was the most important port in the Western Hemisphere, if not the world.” But after a century of existence, Columbia had only 6 faculty members and 140 students.”

Jackson argued that Columbia during this period did not reflect New York’s ethnic and racial diversity. New York, he said, embraced diversity while Columbia did not. “This university, in general, did not break ranks with other elite institutions. It adopted subtle and not so subtle ways of limiting the enrollment of certain groups. It was not until the 1950s that it had a president who wasn’t an Episcopalian. Of course, all institutions like Columbia tended to discriminate. But Columbia could have been different.”

As the first respondent, Evan Cornog, associate dean of the School of Journalism, addressed the question: could the “marriage” between city and universi ty have been “happier”? “We like to think that we are not like other Ivy League schools, which think that distance from the populace

Columbia Announces Pulitzer Prizes For 2004

On April 4, Columbia announced the winners of the 2004 Pulitzer Prizes, journalism’s most prestigious awards.

Of the winning entries in the 14 journalism categories, 5 were taken by The Los Angeles Times, the second highest number of awards won by a newspaper in a single year since the Pulitzers began in 1917. (The New York Times won seven awards in 2002, mostly for its 9/11 coverage.) The Los Angeles Times won Pulitzers for breaking news, national reporting, feature photography, editorials and criticism.

Though much of 2003’s news coverage was dominated by the war in Iraq, only three prize winners focused on the war. Among these, The Washington Post’s Anthony Shadid won the international reporting prize for his “extraordinary ability to capture...” (Continued on Page 7)