Columbia Unveils Urban Design Plan to Community Leaders

By Elizabeth Golden

At an April 21 breakfast meeting with Harlem business leaders, President Lee C. Bollinger presented the University’s proposed plan to convert an underutilized adjacent manufacturing area into a vibrant, mixed-use development that would help meet Columbia’s sig-}

nificant space constraints.

The development of the Manhattanville area of West Harlem is anticipated to generate approximately 9,000 new jobs and provide $4 billion in economic stimulus to the City of New York, according to a study by Appleseed, an independent economic development consulting firm. The University estimates that about 20 percent of its hires in recent years, excluding faculty, have come from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone.

The proposed plan reflects a collaborative community planning process—the most extensive and inclusive in the University’s history. Columbia administrators and staff have engaged in a dialogue with area residents, elected officials and business leaders, Presi-

dents that about 20 percent of its

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Provost Alan Brinkley Looks Back at Columbia’s History at Mid-Century

By Peter Kobel

Columbia Provost Alan Brinkley gave his April 13 lecture, the second in the Columbia 250 series of talks devoted to the University’s history, the form of a question: “Columbia at Mid-Century: The Intellectual Capital of the Nation?” But over the course of his talk, he built such a strong case for a positive answer that he moved from the interrogative to declarative mode.

Brinkley, the Allan Nevins Professor of History, was introduced by series moderator and Barnard history professor Robert McLaughey. “Alan is in some ways the Roger Clemens of academe,” said McLaughey. “Whereas Clemens won pitching awards for both the Red Sox and the Yankees, I think Alan is one of the few individuals to have won teaching awards at Harvard, and then coming to the big leagues, at Columbia.”

Brinkley’s Low Library talk covered Columbia history dur-

ing roughly the two decades after World War II, a period, he said, “of extraordinary intellectual distinction.” He argued that the University’s flowering was not
due to “enlightened” administration or wealth, noting that in the 1950s and 1960s Columbia was already far behind its primary competitors in revenues. Rather, he said, it was the “energy, imagination and brilliance of its faculty and students” that helped Columbia make “a deep and lasting mark on the nation’s culture.” In other words, Columbia’s great asset was its “intellectual capital,” which Brinkley no doubt intended as a pun in his lecture’s title.

Brinkley went on to describe two very different groups at Columbia, which were largely antithetical, but which had a profound influence on American culture. He began by discussing the group of scholars who developed what later became known as “consensus ideology,” an approach typified by Richard Hofstadter, professor and author of such seminal works as The American Political Tradition (1948) and The Paranoid Style in American Politics (1965).

The so-called consensus ideology group, Brinkley said, made an effort to define a vision of American society, which at its core was characterized by material ambition and a commitment to individual freedom. These scholars “did not particularly admire the values of self-interest they described,” and they “despaired at times that so materialistic a nation could produce a culture of real moral worth.”

Nevertheless, they were committed to a defense of the ordered life, but their view of the rational life of the mind “did not go uncontested.” Enter sociologist C. Wright Mills. Mills, who thought of himself as a mis-

fit at Columbia, was the author of such influential 1950s books as White Collar and The Power Elite, drawing “a nightmare portrait of a world in which technocratic elites manipulated and disempowered the helpless masses.” Unlike the consensus ideologists, Mills thought there should be “less, not more, authority from elites.” Mills, Brinkley said, was an inspira-

tion to the new left.

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