



A Storm Foretold: Columbia University and Morningside Heights, 1968

By Christiane Crasemann Collins

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A Storm Foretold: Columbia University and Morningside Heights, 1968 offers an eyewitness account of the famous confrontation between Columbia and its surrounding community, one of the pivotal civil rights battles that characterized the sixties. Focused from the point of view of urban planning, author and urban historian Christiane Crasemann Collins provides firsthand insight into a preeminent institution's racially motivated tactics. With extensive research, architectural maps, and photos of the protests, A Storm Foretold shows how the university pursued the goal of creating an exclusive white acropolis on the Hudson, justified as a "need for expansion." Beginning with a plan to acquire properties on Morningside Heights, and then to empty them of "undesirable" tenants, a planned cordon sanitaire was intended to blockade the campus against the presumed alien territory of the surrounding neighborhoods, including areas in West Harlem and Morningside Park. In 1968, ignoring growing community opposition, Columbia began construction of a gymnasium next to an athletic field the university had shared with the community since the 1950s at the southern end of the scenic park. Collins' story might be titled, "Morningside Park: A Civil Rights Battle Ground" as grassroots opposition by the multi-racial community grew vigorous. Long angered by an intentionally decimating housing policy, and using "Gym Crow" as the symbol of Columbia's racist policy, community residents, students, and African-American organizations united to call for an end to the gymnasium's "invasion" of public open space. A Storm Foretold brings alive the institutional insensitivity and arrogance that ignited the civil rights movement in Morningside Heights, and the issues Collins presents are as relevant today as they were in the sixties.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Christiane Crasemann Collins is a historian of twentieth-century and contemporary architecture and city planning, specializing in Central Europe and the Americas. She grew up in Chile and received degrees from Carleton College and Columbia University. She is the author, with George R. Collins, of Camillo Sitte: The Birth of Modern City Planning, published in 1986, and her major book, Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism, was published in 2005. Her many articles on urbanism explore the transatlantic flow of ideas. Collins presented papers at the International Symposium of Civic Art in 2002 and at the conference on The Circulation of Ideas on Urban Aesthetics in Latin American in 2004. She has received Fulbright and Royal Institute of British Architects research awards, and she has lectured at Cornell University, Columbia University, and the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. She lives in West Falmouth, Massachusetts.

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