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Professor Corinne Gilb marches to her own drummer

"We're at the end of a 400-year cycle. Four hundred years ago there was an end to religious domination in Western civilization. Now we're approaching a similar end to scientific emphasis. We're witnessing the end of European dominance in ideas and institutions. The influence is still pervasive, but it is waning.

"Meanwhile, everywhere on earth, there is an overwhelming growth of urbanism. Everything which happens, happens through cities, but nobody knows why."

Corinne Gilb, professor of urban history at Wayne State University, expresses her thoughts with conviction and intensity. A tall, Junoesque woman, she has a classically beautiful face with high cheekbones and large, expressive hazel eyes. The total effect is that of an academic Ingrid Bergman, wholesome and open.

FOR THOSE WHO perceive "urban" as a euphemism for black, like "disadvantaged," Dr. Gilb's Harvard Ph.D. and undiluted WASP ancestry are surprising. Born in Alberta, Canada, of American parents, she grew up in ranching country, a product of open spaces. She is the eldest of four children — and the only girl; her teaching career represents a family tradition:

"My grandmother was a teacher, my aunt a history teacher. I was told I would be a history teacher when I was 4."

She was 8 when the family moved to a farm in eastern Washington, where her father became one of the founders of a sugar beet company. Her childhood memories include lots of books, many animals and a community which consisted of varied human beings:

"There were gypsies, Indians, a few Chinese and Dukhobors (Russian immigrants who wore little clothing)."

Despite the emotional trauma of an extremely handsome father who left the family periodically — at one time he appeared in early movies as an extra — Dr. Gilb's life retained a sense of direction. She attended the University of Washington and married during her junior year.

"**HE WAS A CITY** planning major," she said. "We met in class on constitutional history. My friends in the graduate school office, where I worked, were his staunchest advocates. They were a bit concerned, since I had broken two engagements. They told me, 'This is a sound one. You'd better grab him.'"

She completed her bachelor's degree at Radcliffe, following her husband's employment in planning at Harvard. A lucky baby-sitting arrangement with a live-in English war refugee enabled her to continue her studies.

Her husband found New England too confining, so the family returned to California. Shortly afterward, Corinne Gilb returned to Cambridge, Mass., and her Ph.D. program.

Back at Berkeley, she plunged into research on her dissertation, an oral history of California political figures. The results included not only her degree, but varied professional affiliations: Teaching history at Mills College, association with the Center for the Study of Law and Society, consulting for the California Legislature on income tax legislation.

"**GRADUALLY I** became a political activist, doing lots of public speaking," she said. "In 1960 I presented a report on 'Issues of the Future' at the 1960 Democratic Convention. By that time I was also teaching a variety of courses at San Francisco State College: American values; modern European culture and great world cities."

A 1967 Guggenheim Fellowship sent her to Paris for a year, accompanied by her younger daughter. She found 1967 and '68 years of upheaval and violence at home and abroad.

"I was in Europe in the midst of conflict while telephone calls from home described the two assassinations, the McCarthy candidacy and the Chicago convention. It was strange to come home."

The late Dr. Alfred Kelly offered her a job at Wayne State sight unseen. She accepted and has worked in Detroit ever since — originally because of the opportunities for change and growth in the city following the 1967 unrest. She finds it challenging to pursue a liberal arts orientation in a school where the distinction between education and vocational training is not always clear and where economic survival is necessarily the first priority.

HOME — AND HER HUSBAND — are still in Berkeley, where she lives "when school is out. Ours has been described as a commuter marriage; we meet often at other times, though — in Washington or other cities when there are simultaneously scheduled meetings."

Her husband is now a business executive; both daughters have completed master's degrees and are arts-oriented.

"One is in film-making in California; the other, a flautist, will play with the Yale Chamber Music group this summer," she said. "At times I do worry about their future capacity to be self-supporting in those fields."

"As for me, I march to my own drummer. In a few days that will mean a journey home — to my husband, our California-contemporary house and the garden."

She finds Detroit a fascinating laboratory for a historian and hopes to see more interaction between the university and city government.



Corinne Gilb, Wayne State University professor of urban history

— BY DUANE E. BELANGER, OF THE NEWS