



Leading the Way

In July, a diverse group of world luminaries comes to the Aspen Institute's Aspen Ideas Festival. Among them is historian **Barbara Goldsmith**, who is leading a talk on women and leadership. **Daniel Shaw** tells us why she is the right woman for the job.

IN 1987, BARBARA GOLDSMITH HAD A REALLY GOOD IDEA. An executive-committee member of the PEN American Center and one of America's foremost journalists and social historians, she created and began underwriting an award to spotlight dissident writers enduring persecution under oppressive regimes. To date, 28 of those recipients have been released from prison within four months of receiving the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Awards. "Governments cannot resist newspapers all over the world telling them to let these people out," Goldsmith says.

That initiative and its profound impact alone would have rendered Goldsmith worthy of inclusion in the Aspen Institute's inaugural Aspen Ideas Festival, July 5–10. In this conference, also presented by *The Atlantic* magazine, Goldsmith and ABC news and *20/20* correspondent Lynn

Sherr are moderating a tutorial on women and leadership. And Goldsmith can't wait. "I think it's a wonderful gathering of people from totally different disciplines," she says. "They're mixing it up like you can't believe."

Mixing it up is something the Aspen Institute is determined to do. With the goal of creating "an exciting, unique opportunity for a broad and diverse group of participants to engage in intellectual activities," the Institute is presenting tutorials, seminars, and conversations on topics such as global economics, health and bioscience, culture and society, leadership, and the state of the environment. Attendees include Amazon.com founder and CEO Jeff Bezos, Human Genome Sciences founder William Haseltine, MSNBC host Chris Matthews, Nobel Prize-winner Toni Morrison, United Nations under-



Left to Right: Award-winning author Toni Morrison; Amazon.com CEO Jeff Bezos; MSNBC host Chris Matthews; United Nations special representative Olara Otunnu; Human Genome Sciences founder William Haseltine

secretary-general and special representative Olara Otunnu, Harvard University president Lawrence Summers, and *U.S. News and World Report* editor in chief Mortimer Zuckerman.

As a founding committee member of the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, Goldsmith has seen firsthand the benefits of bringing different fields of knowledge to one setting. “It’s amazing how an economist can learn from an artist,” she says. Yet in many ways, the Aspen Ideas Festival is a celebration of individualism—after all, a groundswell of ideas starts with one person. “People say individuals cannot make a difference, but I agree with Margaret Mead, who said, ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has,’” says Goldsmith. The festival, she notes, comes at a critical juncture for America: We now have the technology, power, and money to implement ideas in ways never before possible.

If there is a common thread linking Ideas Festival participants, it is the undeniable influence each of them—

from Colin Powell to Jane Goodall—has had on our society and the way we view and live in the world. As a journalist, social commentator, and historian, Goldsmith has done her share with her writing. From *Little Gloria...Happy at Last*, which tells the story of the custody battle over Gloria Vanderbilt, to her latest offering, *Obsessive Genius: The Inner World of Marie Curie*, her books have been best-sellers. She manages to popularize history—to bring it alive—without sacrificing substance. *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* is on its way to becoming a major movie, and her articles for *The New Yorker* and other magazines always offer a fresh take on our culture.

While her vivid accounts have moved, entertained, and informed millions, her myriad philanthropic and volunteer efforts to promote and protect human rights have directly affected lives worldwide. The New York Public Library, where she is an executive-committee member, named its Barbara Goldsmith Conservation and Preservation Divisions after she came up with another inspired idea. Goldsmith, an elected member of the

American Academy for Arts & Sciences, became increasingly concerned that our era’s books were surviving only about 30 years—as opposed to the 300 years they’d lasted before the industrial revolution changed the publishing process from acid-free paper to acidic paper. She organized the most influential writers of our time to launch a campaign for the more permanent acid-free paper, and they won a \$20 million governmental grant to make it happen.

In 1989, Goldsmith received a signed declaration from Congress and commitments from every major publisher in the nation and 2,500 writers—all agreeing to use only acid-free paper.

“Now, that was a great idea,” she says without a trace of boasting. “Anybody can have a great idea if they go for it. You have to play up great ideas, and I believe this conference will. Marie Curie was a genius. I’m no genius, but I’ve had a few good ideas.”

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